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Perspective of Comparative Literature and Cultural
Studies.

Degree: Master of Arts

Year this Degree Granted: 1998

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University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **The Satanic Verses and the Rushdie Affair** submitted by Saloni Negi in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Comparative Literature.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the events which followed the publication of Salman Rushdie's **The Satanic Verses** and which culminated in the social and political crisis known as the Rushdie Affair, as well as the novel itself, from the perspective of Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies.

The thesis focuses on both the world and the book to show how closely the two are connected. The social, cultural, and ideological conflicts of the world which followed the publication of the novel are discussed in detail and with sympathy for those protesting the novel, but are ultimately placed within the context of a writer's prerogative to create and explore. The novel is discussed to show how the creative act of the book borrowed freely from the world – current events, history, politics, religion, love, sorrow, joy, suffering, anger, humour and satire – to find novel ways of exploring the human spirit.

For Dad

10 October 1930 to 31 December 1997

I miss you.

Acknowledgements

Thank you, Nasrin Rahimieh, for your excellent thesis supervision and unfailing support.

Thank you, Mom and Bobby, for nagging me constantly to finish this.

Thank you, friends and colleagues, for your companionship and cheer.

Thank you, purveyors of fine coffee and good food, for fuelling my thoughts.

Thank you, Puddy, my big friendly tom, for your affectionate, purring companionship every night I worked on this thesis.

Thank you, Mr. Rushdie, for writing books that get me thinking and keep me interested.

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Introduction

The Outlaw of the Global Village

Just as this thesis was being finalized for submission to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, news broke that the government of Iran made a statement to the United Nations' General Assembly that Iran would not pursue any action or policies leading to the murder of Salman Rushdie, nor would it support any reward offered for the murder of the author. The relatively moderate government of President Mohammad Khatami has long distanced itself from the religious order, or *fatwa*, condemning Rushdie to death. Only in the last few days, however, has the government issued a formal statement declaring that it does not support the *fatwa*. 1 While Salman Rushdie, his supporters, and the British government welcomed the news, it is unlikely that the author will ever be free of at least some threat to his life. The Special Branch of the British police will continue to grant him protection. According to Iranian officials and clerics, the *fatwa* itself can never be rescinded since the man who issued it is dead.

On February 14, 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini issued the following

---

1 The text of the statement reads in part: "The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has no intention, nor is going to take any action whatsoever, to threaten the life of the author of **The Satanic Verses**...nor will it encourage anybody to do so.

"Accordingly the government dissociates itself from any reward that has been offered in this regard and does not support it."

Paul Knox with Reuters News Agency, **The Globe and Mail**, 25 September 1998, p. A1.

The Iranian government's position is not as strong as one would wish. It only dissociates itself from the reward, most recently valued at $2.5 million, offered by the private 15th Khordad Foundation. The government did not make any commitment to declare the reward unlawful, nor to prosecute as criminals those found in Iran planning to murder Salman Rushdie.

religious order, known as a *fatwa*, against British author Salman Rushdie and his publishers:

> In the name of Him the Highest. There is only one God to Whom we shall return. I inform all zealous Muslims of the world that the author of the book entitled **The Satanic Verses** -- which has been compiled, printed and published in opposition to Islam, the prophet and the Qur'an -- and all those involved in its publication who were aware of its content, are sentenced to death.
>
> I call on all zealous Muslims to execute them quickly, wherever they may be found, so that no one else will dare to insult the Muslim sanctities. God willing, whoever is killed on this path is a martyr.
>
> In addition, anyone who has access to the author of this book but does not possess the power to execute him, should report him to the people so that he may be punished for his actions.
>
> May peace and the mercy of God and His blessings be with you.
>
> Ruhollah al-Musavi al-Khomeini
> 25 Bahman 1367[2]

The edict is worth reading in its entirety if only to appreciate the magnitude of the Ayatollah's wrath, and by association, of the entire apparatus of Muslim clerics and religious law for which he, putatively at least, spoke.

The *fatwa* was broadcast in Iran before the 2 pm news. The BBC World Service telephoned Salman Rushdie about it and by lunchtime in England, he was discussing the sentence in the media. The same afternoon, British police accorded Rushdie "grade one" protection of the sort normally reserved for foreign dignitaries. On February 16, Rushdie attended a memorial service for his friend Bruce Chatwin. After the service, Rushdie and Marianne Wiggins, his wife at the time, were escorted into a car by the Special Branch of the police and taken into protective custody. A week later, the Special Branch spirited the couple into hiding.

The *fatwa* was the spectacular culmination of a series of events which came to be known collectively as the Rushdie affair. Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, then speaker of the Iranian parliament, could not have been alone in his sentiments when he said that the Rushdie affair was "one of the rarest and strangest events in history."[3] Indeed, the fatwa and its consequences have no historical precedent. Never before had a government sentenced to death a private citizen of a foreign country for, of all things, a novel he had written. Never before had controversy over a novel escalated into a civil conflict within states and into a diplomatic crisis internationally. In a matter of hours, Salman Rushdie became, in the words of Eliot Weinberger, "the first outlaw of the global village. A man for whom exile is not possible."[4]

Eliot Weinberger's summary of Rushdie's predicament contains the keywords I would like to elaborate upon to develop an introduction to this thesis and to put forward the reasons why the Rushdie affair merits -- no, demands --

---

[2] Daniel Pipes, **The Rushdie Affair**, (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1990), p. 27.

[3] Pipes, p. 232. Rafsanjani's comment was made on Radio Tehran, March 10, 1989.

[4] Ibid.

analysis within a framework of comparative literature and cultural studies.

Salman Rushdie became an outlaw of the global village. Had the Ayatollah confined himself to ordering Hezbollah, for example, to assassinate Rushdie, the writer's plight, while no less disastrous, would have been shared by any number of people. The Khomeini regime counted among its enemies dissident Iranians, other Middle Easterners, Europeans and, with special zeal, Americans. Hezbollah operatives killed many such enemies through the 1980s and were themselves killed, a result either of suicide missions or of a fatal ineptitude with bombs. Salman Rushdie was far from being the only person to have a *fatwa* against him.

What made the *fatwa* against Rushdie unique in the annals of state-sponsored terrorism, however, was that it was an instigation to murder directed not just at the terrorist apparatus of a single state, but at a population of 900 million Muslims living around the world, from Marrakesh to Kuala Lumpur, as well as in sizeable communities in Europe and the Americas.

Despite protests and denunciations of Muslim and non-Muslim states, organizations and individuals, the *fatwa* met with alarming success. Experienced or aspiring assassins around the world, including many of Rushdie's co-citizens in Britain, vowed to carry out the edict. A martyr's death perhaps not being sufficient incentive for all, a hefty financial reward was offered to anyone succesful in murdering the writer. Salman Rushdie truly had nowhere to go but underground.

The global village of almost instant mass communication and mass migrations is a small place from which no exile is possible. What happens in an increasingly globalized context where contrasting -- sometimes conflicting -- cultures and traditions meet on the streets of the modern metropolis, or where a novel of hybrid cultures and ideas such as **The Satanic Verses** wends its way through an international marketplace is a question of vital importance to the study of comparative literature because of its global scope, and will be the focus of my thesis.

The Rushdie affair also belongs to the domain of cultural studies, a discipline contiguous with that of comparative literature, because the history of comparative literature has always been defined by a consideration of influences across borders, languages and cultures. **The Satanic Verses** is of strong interest to anyone who loves the created worlds of fiction, and is curious about how the creative act can both absorb and influence the world. **The Satanic Verses** has absorbed different languages, cultures and traditions while at the same time being influenced by their differences, the ways in which they contrast with one another, and most notably, the ways in which they oppose one another. The novel then went on to exert its own influence -- both as a text and as an event -- across traditional boundaries.

The events following the publication of **The Satanic Verses** dramatized vividly the cultural oppositions which are the essential stuff of the novel: the Rushdie affair brought about a remarkably public convergence of the extratextual and the intratextual. The kinds of struggles waged around the novel were at its thematic heart as well. The affair was thus about the world and the book. This thesis will explore both.

Finally, on a personal note, **The Satanic Verses** addresses my condition, that of my family and of many people I know. We who are first-generation immigrants find a special resonance in the novel's themes of belonging and alienation as we rise to the challenges of synthesizing our old selves with something new. I undertook this thesis in no small measure to better understand our condition.

Chapter One

An Overview of the Rushdie Affair
and
An Introduction to the Incident of the Satanic Verses

At the heart of **The Satanic Verses** is a cultural and ideological conflict between the sacred and the profane, between religious and secular modes of being, or, if you will, of discourse. By exploring the origins of religious revelation and by questioning its intent, **The Satanic Verses** is situated firmly in an intellectual tradition dating at least as far back as the inquiries of Ibn-Sina (also known as Avicenna, d. 1037) and Ibn-Rushd (Averroës, d. 1198). The two philosophers were engaged in the debate between the humanist philosophy of Greek antiquity, paticularly of Aristotle, whom they admired, and the prophetic revelations of theQur'an. As Fernand Braudel elucidates in **A History of Civilizations**, the problem for the Arab philosophers was that:

> Faith, revealed through Mohammad, had imparted to humanity a divine message. Could the thinker, unaided, discover the truth of the world, and set his own judgement over the value of dogma?[5]

While Ibn-Sina, Ibn-Rushd and their co-religious contemporaries found ingenious and varying ways of synthesizing the two disparate modes of understanding the world, **The Satanic Verses** points to a conclusion reached far more recently by Mircea Eliade: The abyss that divides the two modalities of existence, the sacred and the profane -- (...) Are two modes of being in the world, two existential situations assumed in the course of history.[6]

---

[5] Fernand Braudel, **A History of Civilizations** (New York: Viking Penguin, 1994), p. 83.

The **Satanic Verses** posits an active, questioning doubt as the opposite of faith -- the certainty of the non-believer itself being a kind of dogma -- and opts ultimately for an engaged and optimistic secularism. Of the two principal protagonists in the novel, one is destroyed by his craving for religious faith in the face of his inability to believe, while the other is saved because he embraces the secular, the here and now. The relationship between the two -- and by extension, between the two modes of being for which they are metaphors -- is adversarial, marked by misunderstanding, miscommunication and mutual ignorance. The conflict within the novel thus mirrors the conflicts made explicit in the Rushdie affair.

Broadly speaking, **The Satanic Verses** recounts the intersecting and diverging trajectories of two Indian actors, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, who meet aboard an Air India flight from Bombay to London. Fate intervenes in the form of a terrorist who blows up the plane in mid-flight. By some miracle, Gibreel and Saladin survive the fall and the impact to walk across the water of the English Channel to England's shores. During the fall, Saladin is transmogrified into a devil with horns and hooves while an angelic halo glows around Gibreel's head. Thus begins an epic battle, with constantly blurring boundaries, between good and evil, belonging and alienation, faith and doubt.

---

[6] The quotation is from M. Brent Sleeper's **Satanic Verses and Last Temptations**, 1992, written as an undergraduate thesis in Religious Studies at Carleton College.

The Satanic Verses questions the nature of faith through a portrayal of its origins. Although no explicit mention is made of any specific religion or book, a secondary narrative within the novel is clearly engaged in a metahistorical rewriting of the founding of Islam and the genesis of theQur'an. The fictitious religion is occasionally called "Submission," a literal translation of the Arabic word "islam," which implies submission to the will of God. Its prophet is "Mahound," a slur used by the European crusaders to denote the demonic false prophet of the Moors. Mahound is moreover referred to as "the Prophet," upper-case intact, in the novel. The names of Mahound's wives and companions are the same as those of the historical Prophet. Further, Mahound divides his life between the oasis of Yathrib and the town of "Jahilia." The prophet Muhammad's life was similarly divided between exile in Medina -- which was known in pre-Islamic times as Yathrib -- and Mecca. Muslim historians and scholars use the word "Jahilia" to denote pre-Islamic Mecca. The Arabic word means "ignorance," meaning ignorance of God in pre-Islamic times.

The nascent religion, either despite or because of its overwhelming parallels with Islam, is rendered doubly if not triply fictitious because it exists only in the dreams of Gibreel Farishta, a character who is manifestly insane. To further complicate questions of the representation of Islam, even the dream religion does not exist within a coherent, self-contained cosmos. The boundaries between Gibreel's dreams and the greater fictive reality of the novel are blurred with the actor both dreaming the dream and dreaming himself playing the role of the revelation-reciting Archangel Gibreel.

However, an analysis of the many ambiguities of the narrative is, at this point, beside the point. Literary artifice and layers of narrative notwithstanding, the portrayal of Islam in **The Satanic Verses** had far greater impact on Muslims than it did on literary critics.

What caused many Muslims profound distress were not the conclusions about the relative merits of faith and secularism implicit in **The Satanic Verses**, but the manner in which those conclusions were reached. What caused grievous offence was the novel's representation of the Prophet, his companions, his wives, the faith he founded, its first adherents and, most crucially, of the divine revelation of the Qur'an.

The portrayal of the thinly disguised Prophet and his companions is unflattering and frequently derogatory. Particularly scandalous is a scene which many wrongly believed depicted the Prophet's wives as prostitutes. The character Gibreel dreams of a brothel in which each of the twelve resident prostitutes assumes the identity of one of the Prophet's wives. The narrative suggests that the ancient Madam of the whorehouse is a sort of overseeing mother hen reminiscent of Khadija, the revered first wife of the Prophet.

The fantasy is so popular with the men of the town that business, the reader is told, increases by 300 per cent. On one level, it is possible to appreciate the ironic intent of the passage: early adherents of the faith are shown to be hypocritical and corrupt. There is also a strong suggestion that the first Muslims were conscripts rather than converts, moved more by a terror of the Prophet and his thuggish companions than by any devotion to God. They are more likely therefore to thrill at the prospect of cuckolding the Prophet, if only in a very active fantasy life. Many readers, however, were in no mood to savour the irony, or to appreciate the distinction between depicting the Prophet's wives as prostitutes and depicting prostitutes playacting as the Prophet's wives. To add insult to injury, the brothel is called The Curtain, a reference to the *hijab*, the garment of modesty prescribed for the women among the faithful. The brothel is further located in Jahilia, a reference to the holy city toward which the faithful turn five times a day in prayer.

The aspersions cast against the Prophet and those close to him are easy enough to grasp even through a cursory reading of the novel or even, as was frequently the case, through a second- or third-hand relating of the brothel scene. More recondite is the eponymous incident of the satanic verses, and it is through a close, informed reading of this incident that the full extent of Rushdie's transgression becomes clear.

Before explaining the legend of the satanic verses and discussing its appearance in the novel, it is important to consider the unique status of the Qur'an. For Muslims, the Qur'an is the Word of God. To repudiate this is to cease to be a Muslim. Each of the other two major monotheist faiths also has a similarly irreducible founding assumption. For Judaism, it is the covenant between God and Abraham, for Christianity, that Jesus is the Son of God. Disavowing either is to cease to be Jewish or Christian.[7]

While Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, is a revealed religion, taught to mankind by God through intermediary prophets or a messiah, the status of the Qur'an as a revealed Book is different from that of the Christian or Hebrew bibles. The Bible and the Torah are conventionally understood to be divinely inspired creations. Unlike the authors of the synoptic gospels, for example, the Prophet Muhammad did not interpret the Word before having it inscribed in the Qur'an.[8] Through the agency of the Archangel Gibreel, the Word was revealed to Muhammad over the course of twenty-three years, from about 609 to 632. The Prophet recited it literally and precisely to be copied in the Qur'an.[9]

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[7] Pipes, p. 56.

[8] The comment regarding the gospels and the distinctions between inspiration and revelation are from M. Brent Sleeper. It has also been corroborated by other readings, but none have captured the difference as succinctly as Sleeper.

[9] The revelation is acknowledged to be part of the historical record and will be treated as historical fact. At this point, I am only interested in relating the incident of the satanic verses, questions of personal belief are entirely different and, indeed, personal.

My sources for accounts of the life of Muhammad are:
Braudel, cited earlier, pp. 45 - 50.
Pipes, cited earlier, pp. 56 - 62.

The language of the Qur'an is also of significance, being clearly distinguishable from all variants of historical or contemporary Arabic, written and spoken, including the language recorded as having been used by the Prophet in his day-to-day life.[10] The Qur'an is seen therefore as uniquely, integrally, and inviolably the Word of God, so much so that it remains to this day the book most widely read in its original, untranslated form.

The Qur'an is global in its embrace of all spheres of human activity. For this reason, writes one Muslim scholar, the Qur'an is not just revelation: "it is also truth, knowledge, wisdom, law, destiny, remembrance."[11] Muslims believe in the doctrine of Inlibration, the embodiment of God in a Book.[12] The essential point to realize is how much religious beliefs and practices matter in the daily life of believing Muslims, and that they flow from the Qur'an, with supplemental guidance from the Sunnah, a companion volume of practical examples given by the Prophet about living according to the precepts of Islam.[13] For this reason,

---

J.M. Roberts, **The Penguin History of the World**, revised edition, (London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 314 - 319.

Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies, **Distorted Imagination**, (London: Grey Seal Books, 1990), recount portions of the Sira (the life of the Prophet) at various points throughout the text.

[10] Sardar and Davies, p. 144.

[11] Ibid., p. 88.

[12] Daniel J. Boorstin, **The Creators**, (Vintage Books: New York, 1992), p. 63.

[13] The distinction between the two volumes is analogous to the distinction between the Torah and the Talmud.

any attack of the Qur'an, whether perceived or real, is seen as an attack on the very essence of what it is to be Muslim.

The incident of the satanic verses can be understood only within the context of the profoundly heartfelt reverence accorded the Qur'an.

Salman Rushdie did not invent the satanic verses. With some variations, the legend of the satanic verses is recorded by a number of scholars, including historians al-Tabari (d. 923) and ibn-Saad (d. 845), a collector of hadith (a record of the sayings and traditions passed down by the Prophet and his companions, as well as the body of tradition knowledge relating to them) known as al-Bukhari (d. 870), and the geographer Yaqut (d. 1229).[14] However, Muslim scholarship has long dismissed the story of the satanic verses as apocryphal and disputes the integrity of the early sources, arguing for example, that al-Tabari was a "compendium maker" leaving the separation of fact from fable to others.[15]

According to the historical record, Mecca at the time Muhammad lived there, observed and was hospitable to a broad polytheism of nature, gods, demons and spirits. Its many shrines, temples and idols attracted tourists and pilgrims with plenty of disposable income. Of particular importance was a black meteoric stone, which had been important to the religious practices of the land for centuries. Mecca was dominated by the Quraysh, a wealthy Bedouin tribe.[16] The Quraysh were opposed to Muhammad's monotheistic faith, a faith which moreover forbade shrines and idols.

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[14] Pipes, p. 58.

[15] Sardar and Davies, pp. 147 to 150, offer an extended argument against al-Tabari's account.

Now, the following is the account of the satanic verses as it appears in al-Tabari.[17]

Motivated by a concern either for their own gods or for the revenues of their shrines, the Quraysh offered Muhammad a compromise. If Muhammad would accept their three principal goddesses, he would be offered a seat on the governing council, and the Quraysh would themselves become converts, thereby encouraging by example the conversion of other nobles and influential people.[18]

---

[16] Muhammad was himself born in about 570 to parents who belonged to the Hashim, a branch within the tribe of Quraysh which was not wealthy. Muhammad was orphaned young and was raised by an uncle. Muhammad's first wife, Khadija, was a wealthy Qurayshi widow whose business interests he managed.

[17] Pipes, pp. 57 - 58, recounts al-Tabari's version.

[18] References to the Quraysh occur in Roberts, Pipes, and Sardar and Davies. Braudel refers to "rich merchants." Only Pipes mentions the Quraysh's offer, p. 57, and he does so within the context of al-Tabari's story. Pipes does not mention the offer of a seat on the council, but it is a question that Mahound asks himself: "Must I betray myself for a seat on the council?" in Salman Rushdie, **The Satanic Verses**, (Viking: London, 1989), p. 111. According to some accounts, therefore, the Quraysh's offer may have included a seat on the governing council of Mecca.

All references to Rushdie's novel will be from this edition and will be embedded within the text.

The faith had succeeded among slaves, labourers and non-tribal people. Winning over the more privileged classes was becoming important to Muhammad. Faced with the offer from the nobles, Muhammad, in al-Tabari, "hoped in his soul for something from God to bring him and his tribe together."[19] Soon afterward, Muhammad recited the following verses, within the Qur'anic *Surah al Najm* (the Star), mentioning the three pagan goddesses:

> Have you thought of Lat, Uzza
> and Manat, the third, the other?

At this moment, in al-Tabari, "Satan threw on his [Muhammad's] tongue" the following verses:

> These are the exalted birds
> And their intercession is desired indeed.

Upon hearing this, the Quraysh who were at the mosque prostrated themselves, as did other Meccans. The Archangel then appeared before Muhammad and chastised him, "What have you done?" and then revealed that "Satan caused to come upon his tongue" the verse approving the intercession of the three goddesses. "Then God cancelled what Satan had thrown" upon Muhammad's tongue, concludes al-Tabari, causing the Prophet to abrogate the satanic verses with the following verses as they appear in the *Surat al.Najm*:

> Have you thought of Lat and Uzza,
> And Manat, the third, the other?
> Shall He have daughters and you sons?

---

[19] Pipes, p. 57.

> That would be a fine division!
> These are but names you have dreamed of,
> you and your fathers.[20]

The heresy is thus unsaid. It is important to emphasize again a point made earlier: over the centuries since al-Tabari's account, Muslim scholars and historians have concluded that the satanic verses are apocryphal. For example, in his 1936 book, **The Life of Muhammad**, biographer and historian Muhammad Husein Haykal gave a judgment representative of the consensus of Muslim scholars with regard to the satanic verses, calling them "a fable and a detestable lie."[21] The revelation in the Qur'an is the correct and only one, obviating forever the possibility of poly- or henotheism. Haykal's judgment was based on four arguments: the wording of the verses provided by those medieval scholars who do mention the verses varies, the verses themselves betray internal contradictions, the word translated as "birds" is in no way equivalent to "deities" and finally, the honest and impeccable conduct of the Prophet during his life (as detailed in the Sira) would preclude his polluting the revelation.[22] Thus for those few who even knew about the satanic verses, the incident was consigned to the detritus of arcana. That is, until a novelist rushed in where historians refused to tread.

---

[20] Pipes, p. 58. The line, "That would be a fine division!" which appears in the translation used by Pipes is an ironic comment on the notion of God having daughters while believers have sons. Compare the same verses in a more commonly used translation of the Qur'an: *Are yours the males and His the females? / That would be an unfair division.* From Mohammad Pickthall, **The Glorious Qur'an**, (New York: Mostazafan Foundation, 1987), p. 582.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., p. 61.

Resurrecting the incident of the satanic verses, as **The Satanic Verses** does, necessarily means casting doubt on the integrity of the Prophet, and by extension, on the integrity of the revelation. At the very least, the satanic verses raise the following dangerously unorthodox questions:

> Had Muhammad been tricked by Satan?
> Or had the Prophet tried to ingratiate himself with the city leaders, then regretted the effort and recanted?
> Or worse, had the Prophet tried to win their favour, been rebuffed and changed the text accordingly?[23]

As Rushdie's novel itself asks repeatedly of the infant faith, What kind of Idea are you? Are you strong or do you compromise? To put it baldly, was the Prophet motivated purely by the sacred or by something altogether more profane?

In **The Satanic Verses**, Abu Simbel, the Grandee of Jahilia, makes the same offer to Mahound that the Quraysh made to Muhammad in al-Tabari's account. There is, however, an indication in the novel that the Grandee is merely setting a trap for Mahound: *We will set him a little test, a fair contest: three against one.* (P. 104.)

Indeed, Mahound starts to slide down the slippery slope of temptation. He tells his companions, "Sometimes I think I must make it easier for the people to believe." (P. 106) At this juncture, it is the companions who stand firm, proving a faith stronger than Mahound's, which is now starting to look dodgy: "Mahound has been shaken and his followers quake. 'Listen: it is an interesting offer,' says Mahound."

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[23] Ibid., p. 59.

"'It is a tempting deal,' Khalid reminds him." (P. 107)

The disciples cannot bring themselves to agree with Mahound, so his uncle Hamza advises him, "'Climb the mountain. Go ask Gibreel.'" (P. 107) At this point, Gibreel intervenes, not as the Archangel, but as the dreaming actor:

> *Mahound comes to me for revelation, asking me to choose between monotheist and henotheist alternatives, and I'm just an idiot actor having a bhaenchud nightmare...* (P. 109)

In the face of Mahound's anguished pleas, Gibreel remains silent, "empty of answers," and Mahound turns the questioning to himself:

> He *asks*: is it possible that they *are* angels? Lat, Manat, Uzza... can I call them angels? Gibreel have you got sisters? Are these the daughters of God? And he castigates himself, O my vanity, I am an arrogant man, is this weakness, is it just a dream of power? Must I betray myself for a seat on the council? Is it sensible and wise or is it hollow and self-loving? I don't even know if the Grandee is sincere. Does he know? Perhaps not even he. I am weak and he is strong, the offer gives him many ways of ruining me. But I, too, have much to gain. The souls of the city, of the world, surely they are worth three angels?
>
> (P. 111)

Receiving no reply from an angel bereft of answers, Mahound turns his questioning to God:

> Is Allah so unbending that he will not embrace three more to save the human race? -- I don't know anything. Should God be proud or humble, majestic or simple, yielding or un-? *What kind of idea is he? What kind am I?* (P. 111)

The Almighty, however, is singularly absent from the drama, and is reproached for His dereliction as Gibreel Farishta recalls his earlier unanswered appeals:

> Halfway into sleep, or halfway back to wakefulness, Gibreel Farishta is often filled with resentment by the non-appearance in his persecuting vision, of the One who is supposed to have the answers, *He* never turns up, the one who kept away when I was dying, when I needed him. The one it's all about, Allah, Ishwar, God. Absent as ever while we writhe and suffer in his name. (P. 111)

"The Supreme Being keeps away," and revelation occurs in His absence.

> It happens: revelation. Like this: Mahound, still in his nosleep, becomes rigid, veins bulge in his neck, he clutches at his centre. No, no, nothing like an epileptic fit, it can't be explained away that easily; what epileptic fit ever caused day to turn to night caused clouds to mass overhead, caused the air to thicken into soup while an angel hung, scared silly, in the sky above the sufferer, held up like a kite on a golden thread? The dragging again the dragging and now the miracle starts in his my our guts, he is straining with all his might at something, forcing something, and Gibreel begins to feel that strength that force, here it is *at my own jaw* working it, opening shutting; and the power, starting within Mahound, reaching up to *my vocal cords* and the voice comes.
>
> *Not my voice* I'd never know such words I'm no classy speaker never was never will be but this isn't my voice it's a Voice.
>
> Mahound's eyes open wide, he's seeing some

> kind of vision, staring at it, oh, that's right, Gibreel remembers, me. He's seeing me. My lips moving, being moved by. What, whom? Don't know, can't say. Nevertheless, here they are, coming out of my mouth, up my throat, past my teeth: the Words.
>
> Being God's postman is no fun, yaar.
> Butbutbut: God isn't in this picture.
> God knows whose postman I've been.
>
> (P. 112)

The power of the Voice has its origin within Mahound and overwhelms Gibreel. According to Rushdie's retelling, then, it is the Prophet, not Shaitan, who is the source of the revelation of the satanic verses. Yes, the Prophet is the dream figure Mahound, not Muhammad, but for many, the veil of fiction slips away completely when Mahound recites verbatim the same Surah recited by the Prophet Muhammad (p. 114), before inserting the satanic verses.[24] Consistent with the account of al-Tabari, the throng of Jahilia bursts into jubilation. Wave upon wave of the newly faithful chant "Allahu Akbar," and, taking the Grandee's lead, prostrate themselves on the ground.

Mahound's original disciples, however, are horrified at the scene of the "desolating triumph of the businessman," for he truly has struck a deal.

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[24] From Sardar and Davies, page 156. The following comment by Sardar and Davies also elucidates Muslim response to Rushdie's use of the Surah: "Rushdie is not imagining an encounter; he is taking all the substance of the narrative from a historical source, closely paralleling the detail contained in the version narrated by al-Tabari. Are the verses of the Qur'an then part of Rushdie's fiction? Most important of all, is it a legitimate use of fiction to manipulate sacred text without acknowledgement?"

Rushdie does acknowledge use of several translations of the Qur'an, In a subsequent meeting with Hind, the wife of the Grandee, Mahound learns that Abu Simbel may not honour the deal. The scandalous implication within the narrative is that it is Hind and her goddess al-Lat, not the angel Gibreel, who convince Mahound (Muhammad) of his error:

> "I am your equal," [Hind] repeats, "and also your opposite. I don't want you to become weak. You shouldn't have done what you did."
>
> "But you will profit," Mahound replies bitterly. "There is no threat now to your temple revenues."
>
> "You miss the point.... Yours is a patronizing, condescending lord. Al-Lat hasn't the slightest wish to be his daughter. She is his equal, as I am yours..."
>
> "So the Grandee will betray his pledge," Mahound says.
>
> "Who knows?" scoffs Hind. "He doesn't even know himself. He has to work out the odds. Weak, as I told you.... Between Allah and the Three there can be no peace. I don't want it. I want the fight. To the death; that's the kind of idea I am. What kind are you?"
>
> "You are sand and I am water," Mahound says. "Water washes sand away."
>
> "And the desert soaks up water," Hind answers him. "Look around you." (P. 121)

Mahound returns to the Archangel for further revelation. A dreaming Gibreel recounts for the second time that Mahound "did his old trick, forcing my mouth open and making the voice, the Voice, pour out of me once again, made it pour all over him, like sick." (P. 123) The Prophet, his character already sullied, is then shown to indulge in *post facto* rationalization: "'It was the Devil,' he says aloud to the empty air, making it true by giving it voice. 'The last time it was

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"with a few touches of (his) own," in an afterword.

Shaitan.'" (P. 123) At this point, the first and only overt reference to the verses is made:

> He (Mahound) returns to the city as quickly as he can to expunge the foul verses that reek of brimstone and sulphur, to strike them from the record for ever and ever, so that they will survive in just one or two collections of old traditions and orthodox interpreters will try and unwrite their story... (P. 123)

Gibreel the dreamer interrupts Mahound's ruminations:

> From my mouth both the statement and the repudiation, verses and converses, universes and reverses, the whole thing, and we all know how my mouth got worked. (Ibid.)

Thus, for the third time, the reader is reminded that the revelation comes from Mahound.

Mahound abrogates the satanic verses. His lapse, however, makes the recitation he inserts in their place suspect and irrevocably false. Mahound's disappointed disciple Khalid is eager to forgive him, and more tellingly, is eager to banish his own doubt:

> Awkwardly he says: "Messenger, I doubted you. But you were wiser than we knew.... You brought us the Devil himself, so that we could witness the workings of the Evil One, and his overthrow by the Right."
>
> Mahound moves away from the sunlight falling through the window. "Yes." Bitterness, cynicism. "It was a wonderful thing I did. Deeper truth. Bringing you the Devil. Yes, that sounds like me." (P.125)

Mahound skulks in the shadows, hiding his duplicity.

Islamic tradition considers the Prophet Muhammad human.

Criticism of him is sacrilege, but not blasphemy. Casting doubt on the divine revelation itself, however, is blasphemy according to Islamic law. While Rushdie goes on to lampoon the Word in the story of Salman the Persian (pp. 363 - 368), which also suggests that Mahound is an imposter, the greater part of the damage is already done.

Muslim scholars and religious leaders saw Salman Rushdie's rewriting of the incident of the satanic verses as a deliberate distortion of Islamic history. In their eyes, Salman Rushdie is guilty of a double blasphemy -- the first being the profaning of the Qur'an, in all senses of the word, and the second being the deliberate distortion of Islam and Islamic history. The reasoning is as follows:

> For the Muslim truth is attainable though knowledge; knowledge is both a constituent to faith and a means to attaining faith. Knowledge succeeds by separating fact from fiction and making that separation clear.... Rushdie's book constantly stresses that he is, after all, setting the whole thing in fiction, and what is more, a dream. The point for the Muslim is that by working in fiction with that which is fact, and debatable fact at that, the only conceivable result is to publish a confusion. By virtue of Rushdie's reputation and the support of his publishing agents, this confusion will become widespread among those without the means to judge or to evaluate the facts contained within the fiction. Knowingly to spread confusion, especially to such an audience, is blasphemy and a *fitna* (strife), since it defies one of the most central tenets of Islamic consciousness.[25]

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[25] Sardar and Davies, p. 151.

In the event however, it can easily be argued that "many of those without the means to judge or to evaluate the facts within the fiction" ended up the dupes not of Salman Rushdie but of their own imams, mullahs, and community leaders.

The grassroots protests against **The Satanic Verses** began with the circulation of photocopies of selected passages of the novel. The leading protestors had read only these pages, devoid of context, and countless more had merely been told about them before being exhorted to protest. The question, however, of how any one community or individual responds to **The Satanic Verses** remains rooted in issues of cultural difference and culturally encoded readings.

Distinguished Indian novelist and journalist Khushwant Singh was in the position of appreciating a number of different cultural codes. In his role of editorial advisor to Penguin India, Singh recommended that the novel not be published. He told two Muslim Members of the Indian Parliament, Syed Shahabuddin and Kurshid Alam Khan, who were also members of the opposition Janata party, about the novel.[26] In a later interview, Singh is reported to have said "I had read the manuscript carefully and I was positive it would cause a lot of trouble. There are several derogatory references to the Prophet and the Qur'an. Muhammad is taken to be a small-time imposter."[27]

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[26] Khushwant Singh's role is mentioned in Sardar and Davies, p. 184. The two Indian parliamentarians' efforts to ban the novel are in Sardar and Davies, p. 184, Pipes, p. 19, Sleeper, and in:

Lisa Appignanesi and Sara Maitland, **The Rushdie File**, (Syracuse University Press: Syracuse, 1990), p. xiii, pp. 3, 28, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37 - 41, 43, 44, 60.

Ten days before publication, Syed Shahabuddin and Kurshid Alam Khan led the campaign to have the book banned in India. **The Satanic Verses** was published in Britain on September 26, 1988, with Indian magazines carrying reviews complete with excerpts from the novel. Not liking what they read, the politicians escalated their efforts and succeeded in having Rajiv Gandhi's government ban the book. Some charged that Gandhi was jeopardizing freedom of speech to pander to the Muslim vote while others applauded his decision as a defence of Islam, a minority faith in India. Whatever the motive, **The Satanic Verses** was banned in India on October 5, 1989. Pakistan quickly followed India's example.

In an open letter to Salman Rushdie, published a week after the ban, Syed Shahabuddin wrote:

> You are aggrieved that some of us have condemned you without a hearing and asked for the ban without reading your book. Yes, I have not read it, nor do I intend to. I do not have to wade through a filthy drain to know what filth is. My first inadvertent step would tell me what I have (sic) stepped into. For me, the synopsis, the review, the excerpts, the opinions of those who had read it and your gloatings were enough.[28]

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[27] Sardar and Davies, p. 188, citing *Sunday Magazine*, Calcutta, 28 October 1988.

[28]

Unfortunately, Shahabuddin's tone, logic, invective, and his attack against Rushdie personally, came to characterize the most vociferous of the protests, drowning out the voices of the many people, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, who were trying for a peaceful resolution.

Muslim leaders in Britain were contacted by their Indian counterparts about **The Satanic Verses** in October, 1988. Faiyazuddin Ahmad of the Islamic Foundation in Leicester bought the novel, was horrified, and sent photocopies of the offending passages to other Islamic organizations in the UK. Also, in October, more copies were sent to the London embassies of the 46 member-states of the Organization of the Islam Conference.[29] The Saudi government was among the first to take up the cause with the Saudi-sponsored UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs. The Committee united other influential organizations in the UK, including the Islamic Society for the Promotion of Religious Tolerance, and was supplemented by another unbrella group, the Union of Muslim Organizations. The British Muslim Action Front was also formed, specifically for the Rushdie Affair.

Together, the groups made repeated petitions to Penguin to stop further publication of **The Satanic Verses**. They asked that all copies of the book be recalled and pulped, with Rushdie paying restitution equal to the

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The letter was published in **The Times of India**, October 13, 1988. Republished in Appignanesi and Maitland, pp. 37 - 41.

proceeds from the sales of the novel to Muslim charities. They petitioned the government to ban the novel under the British law prohibiting blasphemy, and under the Public Order Act (1986). They also petitioned to have Rushdie prosecuted under the Race Relations Act (1976).[30]

In the meantime, on November 8, **The Satanic Verses** won the Whitbread prize for best novel. For those protesting the novel, the decision of the Whitbread committee was a slap in the face, exposing glaringly the insensitivity in Britain toward the Muslim immigrant community. The petitions to Penguin continued to be in vain. Although Salman Rushdie was receiving death threats as early as October, Penguin discounted the petitions against its latest success, and, on November 11, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher stated there was "no ground for prosecuting" Rushdie, while Attorney General Patrick Mayhew said the book was not a criminal offence. The organizations' efforts through all official channels were failing.

On November 24, **The Satanic Verses** was banned in South Africa, a country with about half-a-million Muslims, a third the number of those in Britain. The controversy quickly acquired global dimensions as other countries with significant numbers of the world's 900 million Muslims joined the ban.[31]

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[29] Appignanesi and Maitland, p. 49 and Pipes, p. 20.

[30] Appignanesi and Maitland, pp. 41 - 49, and Pipes, pp. 20 - 22.

[31] There were exceptions: after much debate, Turkey decided to abide by its

Frustrated by their own government's resistence, Muslims in Bolton organized a ritual book-burning on December 2, 1988. Although some 7,000 people attended the demonstration, the event was considered a failure because of scanty media coverage.[32]

The first truly dramatic images of the controversy over **The Satanic Verses** showed up on television screens on January 14, 1989, with coverage of a demonstration in Bradford organized by the Bradford Council of Mosques. Although the protest attracted only about 1,000 people, far fewer than the number at Bolton, organizers had non-Muslim supporters, including local politicians and the bishop of Bradford. The media descended upon the scene in force. Their cameras depicted unruly mobs proliferating on English streets.

Protesters were shown shouting in senseless sound bites. Imagine a bunch of soccer hooligans being shown as representative of all Britons. Gratifyingly frightening images of the public burning of **The Satanic Verses** were themselves incendiary and were broadcast around the world for days. The debate between the conflicting factions broke down to such a degree than any further dialogue was impossible. The simplified polemics of the issue now pitted the most cherished values of the West, democracy, freedom of speech, secularism, against the mad lawless fanaticism of Islam and its adherents. The

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secular principles, while Japan and Venezuela became the only non-Muslim countries to impose the ban.

[32] Appignanesi and Maitland, p. 43, Pipes, p. 23.

media thus fueled ideological warfare in a two-pronged offensive levelled at the immigrant Muslim community in the West, and -- bolstering this effort -- at Islam in general. Images of the book-burning marked a point of no return both in the degeneration of public debate and in the escalation of the crisis.

On January 29, about 8,000 Muslims -- identified now as fundamentalists -- marched in London to protest the novel but again failed to move either Penguin or the government. The second key event in the escalating crisis took place three days later. On February 1, 1989, Home Secretary Douglas Hurd announced that Britain's blasphemy laws applied only to Christianity. He made no offer of rapprochement or dialogue with the protestors. Those protesting the novel felt well and truly alienated from their government and their country.

Attitudes hardened, becoming even more combative, with the result that anger spread in Britain and abroad with renewed vehemence. Despite the death threats that were now becoming an almost daily occurrence for Rushdie and his publishers in Britain, the first fatalities of the Rushdie affair were a Pakistani guard, and five rioters shot by police outside the American Center in Islamabad on February 12, the date the novel was published in the United States. The next day, another person died in riots in Srinagar. About 160 people were reported injured in the two incidents.

On February 14, Ayatollah Khomeini, spiritual guide to Iran, took matters into his own hands. Curiously, **The Satanic Verses** had not been banned in Iran at that time. Accounts agree that the Ayatollah had not even heard of the novel until mid-February. He did however hear of the rioting in Pakistan and, according to those close to him, the Ayatollah, pained by the deaths of the faithful, dictated the *fatwa* to one of his secretaries.[33]

In the week following the *fatwa*, events around the world moved very quickly until all sides were locked in a stalemate which exists to this day, almost nine years after the *fatwa*, and long after the Ayatollah's death on June 23, 1989.

To underscore the gravity of the *fatwa*, February 15 was declared a day of national mourning in Iran. On the 16th, demonstrators gathered outside the British embassy in Tehran to listen to political leaders denounce the West as "the enemy of Islam and the manifestation of all things evil."[34] The same day, Seyyed Ali Khameini, the President of Iran, characterized the Ayatollah's statement as an "irrevocable dictum," but on the 17th averred that if Salman Rushdie repented, "the people might forgive him."[35] Faced with pressure from his own government, Rushdie did issue an apology on the following day. It fell well short of true contrition and, in the final sentence, he could not resist a barb of his own:

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[33] An account of how the Ayatollah may have learned about **The Satanic Verses** appears in Pipes, pp. 26 - 27.

[34] Pipes, p. 29. Pipes's source is Iran's Islamic Revolution News Agency, which reported 3,000 demonstrators. Correspondents for the London-based **Independent** reported 1,000 demonstrators: Appignanesi and Maitland, pp. 79 - 80. Accounts agree however that the demonstration was largely peaceful.

[35] Pipes, p. 29.

> As the author of **The Satanic Verses**, I recognize that Muslims in many parts of the world are genuinely distressed by the publication of my novel. I profoundly regret the distress the publication has occasioned to the sincere followers of Islam. Living as we do in a world of many faiths this experience has served to remind us that we must all be conscious of the sensibilities of others.[36]

The apology was welcomed by Britain's Islamic Society for the Promotion of Religious Tolerance. Its chair, Dr. Hesham El Essawy (a Harley Street dentist) said, "I regard it as an apology and it should pave the way out of this crisis."[37] The Bradford Council of Mosques, however, described the author's statement as "not a sincere apology but a further insult to the Muslim community as a whole."[38] Meanwhile, an Iranian news agency reported that the apology, "though far too short of repentance, is generally seen as sufficient enough to warrant [Rushdie's] pardon by the masses in Iran and elsewhere in the world."[39]

Not surprisingly, the Ayatollah had the final word. On the 19th, he issued a definitive rejection of Rushdie's apology and reiterated the *fatwa*, exhorting "every Muslim to employ everything he has got, his life and his wealth, to send [Rushdie] to hell."[40]

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[36] Appignanesi and Maitland, p. 98.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Pipes, p. 30.

On February 20, 1989, the European Community officially declared the actions of the Iranian government in the Rushdie affair a "diplomatic incident." On the 21st, Canada, Sweden, Australia, the USA, Norway and Brazil joined the EC in recalling heads of mission from Tehran. In retaliation, Iran recalled its diplomats.

Of course, the Rushdie affair was far more than a diplomatic incident. In the words of one writer, it was a "*Kulturkampf*" dividing "continent from continent, culture from culture and nation from nation."[41] Within nations themselves, the affair led to vehement divisions of opinion. Although there has been much speculation about what went on in Ayatollah Khomeini's mind when he issued the *fatwa*, it is safe to conclude that he took full advantage of the fact that Muslims are now an important minority in Britain, West Germany, France, and the United States. The *fatwa*, addressed to all Muslims, was thus able to precipitate a political, social, and cultural struggle worldwide.

Muslim immigrants in the West were pushed into the limelight, both as subjects of the *fatwa*, and as objects of renewed derision and fear, regardless of their conduct in the Rushdie affair. Immigration is one important aspect of globalization, which, for the purposes of this thesis, may be defined as the movement of ideas, goods, capital, and labour across national boundaries. Now, globalization weakens the cultural coherence of nation-states. No nation, no matter how wealthy, no matter how strong its cultural identity, is exempt from this process. An inevitable response to this weakening of cultural coherence is a backlash against immigration in the form of tribalism and xenophobia.

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Geoffrey Wheatcroft, "The Friends of Salman Rushdie," **The Atlantic Monthly**, (March 1994), p. 22.

Chapter Two will examine the *Kulturkampf* precipitated by the Rushdie affair at its locus, Britain. We have already seen that the protestors were ignored and marginalized until events reached such an impasse that they became the cynosure of the most hostile attention. But the conflict was not confined to that between immigrants and the mainstream. Opinion was sharply divided along religious and ideological lines within both communities. Some Muslims, both secular and religious, dared to speak against those who were baying for Rushdie's blood. Meanwhile, prominent members of the British clergy forgot all about the separation of Church and State. In a unique and farcically misplaced display of solidarity with the Ayatollah, they heaped smug and sententious scorn on Rushdie.

Muslim women displayed far greater courage and in doing so, revealed conflicts based on gender. A group formed Women Against Fundamentalism to support Rushdie, protest the *fatwa*, and not incidentally, the excesses of many Muslim men.

The Rushdie affair also catalyzed a furious debate between the left and the right of the British establishment about that legacy of imperialism, the post-colonial immigrant. Rushdie himself, as an immigrant and a man of the left attracted much hostility and his position within the debate is central to the affair: Salman Rushdie had long been an advocate of minorities. His frequent excoriation of Prime Minister Thatcher and of racism in Britain, however, had earned him enemies on the right and within the Conservative establishment. They who might have supported the author reacted to the *fatwa* with unrestrained glee, while many on the left, including Labour MPs, pussyfooted around the criminal instigation to murder in the name of liberal understanding and multiculturalism. In the aftermath of the *fatwa*, it seemed that representatives of all ethnic, cultural, ideological and religious stripes could not disgrace themselves quickly enough.

Finally, class also proved divisive. Rushdie was prominent in the elite left-wing intelligentsia of literary London. Most Muslims in Britain are workers and shopkeepers who cleave hard to religion and tradition. They had little reason to feel solidarity with Salman Rushdie in his time of trouble, and plenty of reason, as their leaders kept insisting, to feel angry and betrayed. In the end, they were damaged as much by class, cultural and racial prejudice in Britain's mainstream as by their own anger against Salman Rushdie.

The cultural, social and political conflict in Britain, as elsewhere in the world, was played out in the media. Their role, touched upon briefly in this chapter, will be considered in greater detail in the next. The cultural impact of the mass media is crucial to an understanding of the Rushdie affair. Mass communication does not unite humanity into a tidy global village. Instead, it can and did exacerbate old resentments and wounds.

Ultimately, the conduct of the mass media and of the Western establishment during the Rushdie affair devolved to the benefit of the Ayatollah's own ambitions of Islamic and Iranian imperialism. It is true that on the most literal level, the Ayatollah's *fatwa* has not succeeded. Salman Rushdie is still alive. However, in terms of dividing a Western society and sowing bitter discord, the Ayatollah was every bit as successful as he could have hoped to be.

Chapter Two

Kulturkampf

Every year, the British Social Attitudes Survey reveals that most Britons feel there should be tighter controls on immigrants from Africa and Asia, this despite the fact that people from those continents account for about 15% of current immigration levels, while Americans, Australians and Europeans make up over 50%.[42]

No analysis of the Rushdie affair can ignore the effects and history of racial prejudice in Britain. In discussing the damage wrought by racial prejudice upon the immigrant community, it is understood that the word "immigrants" in this study refers to post-colonial blacks, browns and Asians.

While the specific focus will be on the Muslim community, it is important, while reading this thesis, to keep in mind a couple of statistics about non-white immigrants in general: as of 1993, blacks, browns and Asians comprised about 5.6% of the total population of Britain, and almost half of them (46.8%) were born in Britain.[43]

The first Muslims to arrive in Britain in significant numbers were seamen from the Indian subcontinent, come to man the munitions factories during World War II. They were migrants rather than immigrants, who would labour in Britain's factories for a few years and return home. More workers arrived as a result of the social and political upheavals caused by the partitioning of India in 1947. The British Nationality Act of 1948 enshrined the right of citizens of the Commonwealth to enter freely, work, bring their families and settle. They came from the Caribbean, India, Pakistan, and finally, in smaller flows, from Malaysia, Hong Kong, and the African Commonwealth. Some were skilled manual workers, but most laboured as street cleaners and workers on the night shift, in factories and in transportation.[44]

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[42] Anvar Jeevanjee, "Immigration Laws: Are they Fair to Black Britons?" Ethnic Minority Advisory Council, 1982.
Web site: http://www.penlex.org.uk/anvjee1.html

[43] **The Anti BNP Page**. Web site: http:www.foobar.co.uk/users/ankh/anl
The Page no longer appears on the Internet. It is however possible to find similar sites on the World Wide Web by using search strings such as "immigration Britain," "anti BNP," and "anti fascist."

Britain needed plenty of cheap labour to rebuild after the ravages of war. Through the 1950s and 60s, Her Majesty's Government recruited labour from its former colonies. Like other immigrant communities, Muslim communities grew in London, Bradford, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, wherever there was low-paid work that needed doing.

Racial tensions, however, were evident from the beginning. In 1948, efforts of the National Union of Seamen to keep Black and Asian sailors off British ships culminated in a street riot when some 2000 people attacked a hostel for Black seamen. Police stormed the hostel and arrested the seamen. In

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[44] Information drawn from Jeevanjee, cited earlier, and:

Michael M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, **Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition** (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p. 391.

1958, large-scale race riots started in Nottingham and Notting Hill. Attacks on Black people spread to Kensall Green, Paddington, Harlesden, Southall, Hackney, Stepney, Islington and Hornsey. Voices in and out of Parliament began shouting for immigration controls. That year, Labour Party chair Tom Driberg told the Trades Union Congress:

> How can there be a colour problem here? ...there are only 190,000 coloured people in our population of 50 million. The real problem is not black skin but white prejudice.[45]

Nonetheless, a number of Tory MPs launched a lobby group called the Birmingham Immigrant Control Association and the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill became law in 1962. British citizens with passports issued outside the UK would henceforth be subject to entry control via a quota system.

The Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1968 restricted the entry into Britain of British citizens of subcontinental ancestry whose passports were issued Kenya at the very time that Kenyan authorities were threatening them with statelessness. Later, similar measures were employed against Ugandan Asians who had been expelled by Idí Amin. Complementing the Act was a speech by Tory MP Enoch Powell in Birmingham in April of the same year. Powell, who had campaigned vigorously to restrict the entry of Kenyan Asians, spoke of an impending apocalypse of "rivers of blood," overcrowded maternity wards as immigrants bred like rabbits and "grinning picaninnies."[46] Crowds marched to the house of Commons in his support. The net effect of the now-infamous speech was to popularize racism in Britain. "Black," "Brown," and "Asian" became legitimized as political and social classes of people, even in ordinary -- which is to say, not consciously racist -- discourse. Overtly racist attacks on these classes of people became more or less commonplace and continue to be underreported in the media and ignored by those in power.[47]

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[45] Jeevanjee.

The recession of the 1970s hit the minority and working class communities hard. Economic conditions for both groups continued to deteriorate through the 1980s. For minorities, the situation was further exacerbated by the British Nationality Act of 1981. The Act divided British citizens into three classes, depending on their place of ancestral origin: thus, British Citizenship was for those closely connected with the UK, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, citizenship of the British Dependent Territories was for those connected with dependencies, and British Overseas citizenship was for everyone else. In this way were Britons -- admittedly, certain specified Britons -- robbed of a 900-year-old right to citizenship by birth. The Thatcher government pandered to and shared the basest sentiments of the British mainstream. Prime Minister

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Jeevanjee.

The Anti-BNP Page makes similar observations about racial violence in Britain and adds that in 1993 there were 130,000 cases of racially motivated attacks on people. The **Page** does not provide a source for the figure.

Thatcher led the way for the Act by announcing:

> "People are really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people of a different culture. The British character has done so much for democracy and for law and done so much throughout the world, that if there is any fear that they might be swamped, people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in."[48]

And social scientist Paul Gilroy wrote of the Act:

> ...it has jurisdiction not only over the rights of black people to enter Britain, but over the rights of black people resident in Britain.
>
> [The Act] codifies the discriminatory essence of all the Immigration Acts from 1962 to 1971.[49]

Even if allowances can be made for anti-immigrant policies during a time of economic crisis (and indeed, they cannot), there is no reason other than racial prejudice for the government's refusal to distinguish between immigrants of colour and those citizens of colour born in Britain. By the 1980s therefore, the government's initial warm welcome to cheap overseas labour had frosted over to the point where people of colour were marginalized by law, as a matter of government policy.

Economic hard times, popular racism and legislated marginalization went a long way toward creating the kind of society within which the Bradford protests against **The Satanic Verses** were ignored. Adding to the toxicity of these post-war developments was the age-old problem of class prejudice.

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[48] Jeevanjee.

[49] Ibid.

The city of Bradford, with its large and overlapping populations of Asians and jobless, marginalized members of the working class has long borne the brunt of the worst social and political developments in Britain. Still, the Pakistani Muslims of Bradford were and remain highly disciplined, tending to better their lot through hard work and education. Many Muslim immigrants became shopkeepers and small businessmen. The community was cohesive and its sense of kinship meant that members gave one another a hand up.[50] Gradually, in modest but measurable ways, the community was succeeding. By the time of the Rushdie affair, Muslims constituted some 14% of the population of Bradford, proportionately more than any other city in Britain.[51]

Ethnic tensions, an everpresent feature of Bradford life, escalated as economic opportunities disappeared.[52] Many whites, particularly unemployed youth, were openly hostile to Asians. Young Muslim men turned increasingly to religion as a way of asserting their cultural identity, often becoming more militant than their parents.[53] Leading their side of the cultural divide were the mullahs of the Bradford Council of Mosques.

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[50] Fischer and Abedi, p. 392.

[51] Pipes, p. 215, for percentage. Michael Hickling, **Yorkshire Post**, January 25, 1989, for proportion.

[52] Fischer and Abedi, pp. 391-392, give an overview of ethnic and racial tensions in Bradford.

At the time of the Rushdie affair, the Council represented 37 mosques and institutions and was established primarily as a pressure group for Muslim observances at schools.[54] While Islam does not in theory recognize a clerical authority between the faithful and Allah, a powerful theocratic class has in fact emerged in the Muslim world to exercise tremendous authority in matters both sacred and profane. On a modest scale, the mullahs of Bradford had already had a taste of political activism in their battle against a middle school headmaster in 1984 and 1985. Ray Honeyford was appalled at having to allow: "the serving of *halal* meat, ...separate sex P.E. and swimming lessons, ...the adoption of a multi-faith syllabus for R.E., the evasion of sex instruction." He became associated with the **Salisbury Review**, a journal of the New Right Conservative Philosophy Group. The journal was founded by a Cambridge University don who wanted all blacks and browns repatriated or at least reduced to the category of guest workers. Honeyford himself argued that immigration from the subcontinent, East Africa, and the Caribbean would threaten the stability of British culture.[55] As it happened, the headmaster was forced out after a protracted campaign. The mullahs of Bradford led a successful drive to get the

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[53] Ibid., p. 392.

[54] Hickling.

[55] Fischer and Abedi, pp. 392 - 393, provide an account of the Honeyford affair.

British government to establish single-sex schools which serve halal food and teach Islamic religion.[56]

The obvious question arises: if the Bradford Council of Mosques was succesful in its campaign of 1984 - 85, why did its strategies backfire during the Rushdie affair? Frustrated because repeated petitions and the Bolton demonstration against **The Satanic Verses** were to no avail, but still seeking a peaceful means of protest, the Council acted on the very bad advice of a solicitor: if publicity and attention were the goal, protestors might burn copies of the book, a shocking but non-violent act.[57]

The burning book was a harbinger of the *Kulturkampf* to come. Said Sher Azam, Chairman of the Bradford Council of Mosques,

> "We don't regret the burning. It was symbolic how people were burning inside(sic). The media has taken it in a negative way. We were just expressing our feelings in a way that was not illegal."[58]

What was to the demonstrators a ritual act of protest evoked in the Western mind the lunatic excesses of fascism. The media did indeed take it in a negative way. "Islamic intolerance" blared a **Times of London** headline.[59] Even **The Independent**, which is not a right-wing newspaper, editorialized that "a large crowd of Muslims" burnt copies of the book, "following the example of the Inquisition and Hitler's Nationalist Socialists."[60] Thus were the actions of a minority straining to be heard compared to the worst sins of European power run amok. Two days after the *fatwa* in the same newspaper, Anthony Burgess as much as said that the protestors were homicidal idiots:

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[56] Pipes, p. 217.

[57] Fischer and Abedi, p. 393.

[58] Hickling, **The Yorkshire Post**, January 25, 1989.

[59] Appignanesi and Maitland, p. 56.

> I gain the impression that few of the protesting Muslims in Britain know directly what they are protesting against. Their Imam has told them that Mr. Rushdie has published a blasphemous book and must be punished. They respond with sheeplike docility and wolflike agression. They forget what Nazis did to books -- or perhaps they do not: after all, some of their co-religionists approved of the Holocaust...[61]

Burgess' statement is ignoble and absurd considering it can be argued with greater accuracy that some of Burgess' co-religionists thought up and implemented the Holocaust. Rhetoric inflamed rhetoric however, and a few weeks later Shabbir Akhtar of the Bradford Council of Mosques declared, "The next time there are gas chambers in Europe, [Muslims] will be inside them."[62]

Unfortunately, as the months after the *fatwa* wore on, many Muslims delighted in proving Burgess right: "I think we should kill Salman Rushdie's whole family," shouted Faruq Mughal outside a West London mosque.

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[60] Ibid., p. 55.

[61] Sardar and Davies, p. 211, citing **The Independent**, 16 February 1989.

[62] Pipes, p. 229, citing **The Guardian**, February 27, 1989.

Another London man told reporters, "If I see Rushdie, I will kill him right away." The Secretary of the Bradford Council of Mosques, Sayed Quddus, added that Rushdie "deserves hanging." Parvez Akhtar of Bradford told a reporter, "If Salman Rushdie came here, he would be torn to pieces."[63]

By any standard, protest leaders gave very bad press. Not only did they fail to convey the causes for grievance against **The Satanic Verses**, they also contributed to the media's hostile reaction against the entire Muslim community by villifying and threatening Salman Rushdie, often with ghastly zeal. Whatever **The Independent**'s excesses in evoking Hitler, it rightly noted, "[The Muslim's] campaign not just against the book but against Rushdie personally does them no credit."[64] Failure to observe basic law and order, a general ineptitude with the media and personal animosity against Rushdie were the three salient characteristics of the Muslim protests which brought about a hardening of public opinion and ultimately, the failure of their campaign.

Even analysts sympathetic to the grievance against **The Satanic Verses** wrote, "most Muslim leaders are inarticulate and terrified of the media."[65] It is more accurate to say that they were not practised in the discursive norms of Western cultural elites. In the media storm which engulfed the Muslim community after the book burning, leaders had neither the experience nor the resources to mount a counterattack of press releases and speeches. As one journalist noted, they continued to "shoot themselves in the foot."[66] Having to deal with public perceptions of issues far more complex than the attitudes of a headmaster, Muslim leadership fell into disarray, revealing the weaknesses of an isolated and marginalized community.

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[63] Ibid., p. 183.

[64] Appignanesi and Maitland, p. 55.

The actions of the government reinforced the Muslims' sense of marginalization, and in doing so, betrayed the rigidity of so many of the negotiations of the Thatcher administration. Yet again, the lady was not for turning, nor, it became clear, was she for listening to British citizens. The government's continuing indifference to Muslim protests was met with increasing hostility. On June 17, two weeks after Khomeini's death, some 3,500 Muslims demonstrated in Bradford. The event degenerated into a rampage as angry protestors stormed the city's central police station and 54 Muslim youths were arrested. In an official statement, the Bradford Council of Mosques regretted the rioting but blamed the British government and Viking for the outbreak.[67]

The Council should have acknowledged that protesters were wrong to violate the law, and apologized for the breakdown public order. It also ought to have stated a commitment to eschew violence. The Council's many omissions cost it any credibility or public trust it might otherwise have gained. The

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[65] Sardar and Davies, p. 197.

[66] Hickling.

[67] Pipes, p. 217.

Council's claim, however, did contain an element of truth. Had the crisis even threatened to reach a comparable magnitude in Canada, for example, the Federal government would immediately have appointed a task force to consult with community groups across the country. Those who cared about the issue would thus have been afforded an opportunity to voice their opinions in a public forum. Protestors would have had what they craved all along: a public and publicized hearing before the mainstream and power elites of their society. Such a simple expedient on the part of the British government could well have curbed the crisis. Who knows, a debate may even have led to a differentiation of Muslim opinion, sifting moderate from extreme views, perhaps pointing the way to an acceptable compromise. At worst -- because most cynically -- from the perspective of *Realpolitik*, leading protestors might have been co-opted into the task force and thus been obliged to adopt a more moderate stance.

But such speculation is moot. As it was, strident and extremist views seized control of the Muslim campaign. After the *fatwa*, those who espoused such views could not believe their luck: they now had a God-given mission. Chief among the newly emergent hardliners was Kalim Siddiqui, director of the London-based Muslim Institute of Research and Planning. While its name is innocuous enough, the Institute is funded by Iran to mobilize support for Iranian imperialism within Muslim communities in Britain and elsewhere.[68] Siddiqui himself became the best-known radical Muslim in Britain during the

Rushdie affair and was dubbed "Britain's angry Ayatollah."[69] For Siddiqui, who had once stated that "conflict is like sex -- [it] should be enjoyed," the *fatwa* turned the Rushdie affair into no less a matter than "Islam versus Western civilization."[70] He easily filled the void of Muslim leadership in the Western media, often prefacing his comments with "I have been advising the Muslim community..."[71] Among other things, Siddiqui advised the establishment of an Islamic parliament in Britain, and lead the campaign for the death of Salman Rushdie.

Having wrested the media spotlight from other Muslim leaders, Siddiqui's zeal knew no bounds. According to Akbar S. Ahmed, he appeared regularly on the television news, "eyes blazing and beard bristling" to promise, "Islam will get you."[72] Ever the indefatigable campaigner, Siddiqui held a news conference well over a year after the *fatwa* and declared, "the existence of a political and judicial authority of Islam outside Britain has made us invincible."[73] Above all, Siddiqui wanted Islam to get Salman Rushdie, whom he called a

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[68] Sardar and Davies, pp. 197, 198.

[69] Akbar S. Ahmed, **Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise** (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 160.

[70] Sardar and Davies, p. 198.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ahmed, p. 190.

[73] Steve McDonogh, editor, **The Rushdie Letters: Freedom to Speak, Freedom to Write** (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 155.

"wretched man of brown skin living in London."[74]

Throughout the affair, there was no end to the rhetoric directed against Salman Rushdie. Death threats had been a regular occurrence well before the *fatwa*. They were an extreme -- not to mention criminal -- expression of the antipathy against the author which had marked the Rushdie affair since the beginning, since Syed Shahabuddin's letter. Western commentators, almost as much as Salman Rushdie himself, were taken aback by the anger and hatred expressed by Muslim protestors. Whatever one's thoughts about the poisonous rhetoric protestors leveled at Rushdie, it should be possible to put their feelings in a cultural context.

Salman Rushdie belongs to a world very different from that known by the vast majority of Muslims in Britain. He was born into a well-to-do business family in Bombay. Rushdie's father, himself a Cambridge man, was able to provide similar advantages in life to his son. In 1961, thirteen-year-old Salman was enrolled in Rugby. For colonized but affluent Indians of Rushdie's parents' generation, Rugby and similarly elite English public schools represented the summum bonum of educational possibility. For Rushdie, however, the years at Rugby were filled with torment. In interviews, he has said,

> "I had a pretty hideous time from my own age group: minor persecutions and racist attacks which felt pretty major at the time.... I never had any friends at school and I don't now know a single person I was at school

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[74] Sardar and Davies, p. 199.

with."[75]

His Indian way of speaking was laughed at and he was forever made to feel alien, a misfit. In a satirical revue during his final year at Rugby, Rushdie, along with the rest of the school, heard himself lampooned as "the resident Wog."[76]

Lord Norman Tebbit, who was a Cabinet minister through most of the 1980s and a close colleague of Margaret Thatcher's, had this to say about Rushdie's travails at Rugby: "such taunts are suffered by those having any distinguishing marks," and "we mostly shrug them off."[77] The young Rushdie was temperamentally disinclined to shrug. Encountering the sting of racial hatred for the first time -- yet for a long time -- during his formative years, Rushdie's response was rather more combative. On one occasion, he caught a schoolmate scrawling "Wogs Go Home" on a wall. He grabbed the boy and banged him against the wall as hard as he could. Rushdie later called his action the defining moment in his school career and in his whole attitude to life in England. It was the moment, he said, that he learned to strike back.[78]

Salman Rushdie struck back mainly by doing well. He excelled at

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[75] Wheatcroft, p. 21.

[76] Ian Hamilton, "The First Life of Salman Rushdie," **The New Yorker**, (25 December 1995 and 1 January 1996), p. 94. This essay is the single best source about Rushdie's life before the *fatwa*.

[77] Wheatcroft, p. 24.

[78] Hamilton, p. 95.

Rugby and was offered a scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford. He had the rare luxury of turning it down because he'd already been offered a scholarship to King's College, Cambridge. Rushdie's father wanted him to go to Cambridge, but Rushdie, having had enough of England during his Rugby years, just wanted to go home. The trouble was that home no longer existed. The elder Rushdie had sold the family's Bombay home and moved everybody to Karachi. Rushdie found himself in Karachi the summer India and Pakistan went to war over Kashmir. He did not care for Pakistan, finding it the opposite of secular and multiplicitous India. That summer, the armies of both nations made claims on him. Having to choose between India, which Rushdie thought of as home, and Pakistan, his family's new home, proved more than he could bear. In the end, his parents put him on a plane, and he arrived at Cambridge in 1965 to read history.

Rushdie's performance at Cambridge was less stellar than it had been at Rugby but it was there that he embarked on a path which lead to **The Satanic Verses**. In his final year, Rushdie chose a course about Muhammad and the rise of Islam. The lecturer cancelled the course for lack of interest but Rushdie persisted and got permission to study independently. "I remember coming across the incident of the satanic verses," Rushdie said, "thinking, that's interesting, there's something there... and put it away in my head."[79]

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[79] Ibid., p. 96.

Rushdie was graduated from Cambridge in 1968 and returned to Karachi for another disastrous stay. His father had set up a towel factory for him but he had no intention of running it. As bad as the continuing fights between father and son was the problem of censorship in Pakistan. Rushdie had convinced Karachi TV to let him produce and act in Edward Albee's "The Zoo Story." The play contained the word "pork" which, Rushdie was earnestly told, "was a four letter word" and could under no circumstances be uttered on Pakistani television. He also had to excise a line about God being a coloured queen who wears a kimono and plucks his eyebrows. For Rushdie, censorship in Pakistan was "everywhere, inescapable, permitting no appeal." There was, he said, "no room to breathe."[80]

Back in England, Rushdie supported himself partly on the dole, partly on acting gigs, before landing a copywriting job at an ad agency. A couple of agencies later, Rushdie was doing quite well. He put the "bubble" in Aero chocolate bars, coining words like "delectabubble," "irrestibubble," and "incredibubble."[81] In 1971, he completed a first novel which was never published. Two years later, another novel, **Grimus**, was published to reviews ranging from baffled to hostile.

In 1976, Rushdie married and the couple bought a house in North London. The following year, he became involved in a local project to create jobs for Bangladeshi immigrants in that part of the city. His grassroots activism brought him once again into close contact with racism, which, he said, "seeped into every part" of British culture.[82]

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[80] Ibid., p. 97.

[81] Hamilton, p. 100, and Wheatcroft, p. 26.

In 1979, Rushdie completed **Midnight's Children**. It was published to ecstatic reviews and went on to win the Booker Prize in 1981. Literary celebrity brought Rushdie a platform for social and political activism. In 1980, he gave a talk on Channel 4 which became the basis for the first of many essays which were variations on the themes of imperialism and racism.

The essay was called "The New Empire Within Britain." An acerbic Rusdhie said and wrote that since Britain was no longer able to export governments, it had chosen to import a new Empire, "a new community of subject peoples," who are given the same shabby treatment that was meted out by the colonizers. Addressing directly the speeches of Margaret Thatcher, Rushdie said:

> ...the word immigrant means "black immigrant;" the myth of "swamping" lingers on and even British-born blacks are thought of as people whose real "home" is elsewhere. Immigration is a problem only if you are worried about blacks; that is, if your whole approach to the question is one of racial prejudice.[83]

There are times, as one reads the essay, that Rushdie's anger almost blisters the page. As, for example, "British thought, British society, has never been cleansed of the filth of imperialism." And, "Four hundred years of conquest and looting, four centuries of being told you are superior to the Fuzzy-Wuzzies and the wogs leave their stain." And here is Rushdie's parting shot: "When Mahatma Gandhi... came to England and was asked what he thought of English civilization, he replied, 'I think it would be a good idea.'"[84]

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[82] Hamilton, p. 102.

[83] Salman Rushdie, "The New Empire Within Britain," **Imaginary Homelands** (London: Granta, 1991), p. 132.

Rushdie said it all on national television. Now he was striking back as a writer of note and fame, but his words would one day cost him dear.

In 1983, Rushdie won considerable acclaim for another brilliant novel, **Shame**. It was shortlisted for a Booker. No other writer had won the prize twice but Rushdie and his supporters believed he might well be the first to do so. There are stories about how Rushdie denounced the Booker committee and stormed furiously out of the awards dinner when **Shame** was passed over. No matter. With a second ambitious and successful novel, Rushdie's place as a brilliant star in London's literary firmament was secure.

Rushdie continued his attacks of Britain's treatment of its minorities in general and on the Thatcher administration in particular. After Margaret Thatcher's third election victory, he joined the 20 June Group which consisted of left-leaning anti-Thatcher intellectuals, mainly writers and media people. The group was similar in makeup and outlook to Charter 88, another group which

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[84] Rushdie, **Imaginary Homelands**, pp. 129 - 138.

Rushdie supported and described as "an attempt to renew the debate about the kind of country we want to live in."[85] Above all, these Chartists wanted Britain to have a written constitution which enshrined in law certain fundamental rights and freedoms and which would be above the vagaries of government and sectarian politics.

It was not until **The Satanic Verses** that Rushdie explored his experiences with British society in fiction. The incident of the kipper in **The Satanic Verses** condenses what he remembers most vividly of his time at Rugby: Saladin Chamcha is given a kipper to eat in the dining hall on the first day of school. He is not permitted to rise from the table until he is done. Because no one shows him how to eat the kipper, Saladin takes ninety sweaty and humiliating minutes finishing the small bony thing and then has an epiphany:

> He discovered that he was a bloody minded person. "I'll show them all," he swore. "You see if I don't." The eaten kipper was his first victory, the first step in his conquest of England.[86]

Rushdie has said that the kipper story is "absolutely true," it is "one of the few stories I've used in fiction which needed no embellishent at all."[87] The kipper is a metaphor for England, Rushdie's very own whale, which he had conquered well before **The Satanic Verses** elicited the first superlatives from critics in the

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[85] Rushdie, "Charter 88," **Imaginary Homelands**, p. 164.

[86] Hamilton, p. 94.

West.

Yet it was precisely Rushdie's success which made him so hard to forgive in the hearts of the Muslims protesting his novel. There is in Britain a group of intellectuals of subcontinental and Muslim origin who have gained prominence in mainstream literary and media circles. In addition to Rushdie, the group includes novelist and filmmaker Hanif Kureishi, and Tariq Ali, a writer and television producer. Without exception, they are staunch supporters of Rushdie's and have been accused by Muslim academics of using their position to discredit and ridicule Britain's Muslims.[88] Akbar S. Ahmed defines the conflict between the two antipodal South Asian Muslim cultures in Britain as one of class: one culture is composed of middle class professionals, mostly from Oxbridge, mostly living in London. The other mainly of workers and shop-owners from a rural background in the Punjab, Bangladesh or Pakistan. They live in working-class London, Bradford and Birmingham, speak Punjabi or Bengali at home, and find their sense of community at the mosque. The coming together of these two cultures is what caused, writes Ahmed, "the Rushdie explosion." He points out that there are vast discursive differences between the two groups: "irony, humour and cynicism had characterized the middle classes; anger, earnestness and bewilderment the working classes." Now comes the clincher, as Muslim scholars have argued: "paradoxically it was the former that

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[87] Ibid.

[88] Particularly Ziauddin Sardar, quoted in Ahmed, p. 162.

made their name by supposedly representing the latter, as they pontificated about Pakistan and India and issues of Asian poverty in the media."[89]

While Ahmed's observation about class differences stands, Rushdie did not pontificate about such matters. What he did do was speak and write often and often movingly about the racism endemic in British society and about immigrants and refugees, in some cases friends of his, who had been unjustly deported or who had died in fires in overcrowded Council housing. Ahmed's deeper point, however, also stands and his views were shared by many Muslims who believed that Rushdie had made his career as a social and political commentator by representing them, by talking about them. Now, in **The Satanic Verses**, he had used his influential position to ridicule their faith and humiliate them.

With the exception of a short-lived conversion to Islam a year after the *fatwa*, Salman Rushdie has always insisted that he is a secular man, or at the very most, a secular Muslim. Rushdie's position on religion is a product of an upbringing common to any number of middle class and urban Indians, regardless of religious background:

> I was brought up in an Indian Muslim household, but while both my parents were believers, neither was insistent or doctrinaire. Two or three times a year, at the big Eid festivals, I would wake up to find new clothes at the foot of my bed, dress and go with my father to the prayer-*maidan* outside the Friday

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[89] Ahmed, p. 162.

> Mosque in Bombay, and rise and fall with the multitude, mumbling my way through the uncomprehended Arabic much as Catholic children do -- or used to do -- with Latin.[90]

Yet religion was not particularly important in explaining the profound feeling of betrayal in the Muslim community. Religion became the flint which ignited the *Kulturkampf* because it is highly charged with emotion, easy to name, easy to define, and most of all, because the Ayatollah's rallying cry was directed at followers of a religion. Feelings of betrayal in the Muslim community were rooted in previous feelings of solidarity with Rushdie, feelings which, moreover, Rushdie had encouraged. Now someone who had long identified himself as a gadfly acting on behalf of immigrants was portraying their faith in the most ignominious way imaginable.

Edward Said called the inimical description of Muslims, Islam, and the Islamic world in general, "Orientalism." The word is a weighty one and means that the Western discourse on Islam and its people is based on cultural dominance and hostile confrontation. Although Said was not sympathetic to the campaign against Rushdie and his novel, nor to the ways in which it was conducted, he did elucidate the Muslims' sense of betrayal:

> Why must a Muslim, who could be defending and sympathetically interpreting us, now represent us so roughly, so expertly and disrespectfully to an audience already primed to excoriate our traditions, reality, history, religion, language, and origin? Why...

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[90] Rushdie, "In God We Trust," **Imaginary Homelands**, p. 377.

> must a member of our culture join the legions of Orientalists in Orientalizing Islam so radically and unfairly?[91]

To Muslims, one of their own was giving further ammunition to a cultural and discursive tradition which humiliated and despised them. On the other hand, to Rushdie, who insists that he is a secular man, a Muslim by birth rather than conviction, the Muslim response was a repudiation of his freedom as a writer. The bad press and hostile reactions to the protests proved to Muslims that their feelings were well-founded, and served only to harden their position.

Leading the opposition against the Muslims for all the wrong reasons was Britain's right-wing establishment, which was equally hostile to Rushdie. As we have seen, postwar immigration from the Commonwealth is a source of long-simmering resentment for the patriotic or "nativist" right. The book burnings, the violent demonstrations in London, the disregard for civil law as Britain's mullahs hotly endorsed the *fatwa*, and even, in the case of Kalim Siddiqui, called for a separate parliament for Muslims, all served to confirm that resentment of immigrants had been justified all along. Nor had Rushdie endeared himself to the right. The censure and blame the right heaped on Rushdie missed entirely the point of a civic society. Referring directly and indirectly to Rushdie's famous speech on Channel 4, leaders and intellectuals of the right now gloated over his predicament. In **The Spectator**, Sir Auberon

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[91] Said in Appignanesi and Maitland, p. 165.

Waugh wondered "just how much we should exert ourselves as deeply stained imperialists to protect him from his own people."[92] Lord Tebbit called Rushdie "an outstanding villain," and continued thus:

> His public life has been a record of despicable acts of betrayal of his upbringing, religion, adopted home and nationality. Now he betrays even his own sneers at the British establishment as he cowers under the protection of a government, a police force, and a society he once denounced as racist and undemocratic.[93]

Some months after the *fatwa*, Hugh Trevor-Roper, formerly head of a Cambridge college, issued his own mini-*fatwa*: he "would not shed a tear," he wrote, "if some British Muslims deploring [Rushdie's] manners should waylay him in a dark street and seek to improve them."[94] Other Tory politicians also had a field day villifying Rushdie, most often for the reason that his case had damaged relations and trade with Iran and other countries. Former Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath opposed any meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Rushdie because, on account of "that wretched book," British industry had lost "masses of trade."[95] And Peregrine Worsthorne summed up the situation in **The Sunday Telegraph**: "The liberals made their multicultural bed. Now they must lie on it, along with the rest of us."[96]

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[92] Wheatcroft, "The Friends of Salman Rushdie," in **The Atlantic Monthly**, (March 1994), p. 24.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid.

The irony is that many liberals were only too eager to jump into the multicultural bed. They rationalized away the responsibility of defending Rushdie in the name of multiculturalism. It was true not only of Labour MPs with sizeable South Asian constituencies but of Liberal intellectuals as well. Michael Dummet, a professor of logic at Oxford University wrote in an open letter to Rushdie:

> You were a hero among members of ethnic minorities... for your forceful television broadcast denouncing British racism.... Much as you might want to, you can never again play that role: you can never again credibly assume the stance of denouncer of white prejudice.[97]

Professor Dummet's comments seem to be notably lacking in logic. Because you criticized apples, he tells Rushdie, you are no longer fit to criticize oranges. Roy Hattersley, deputy leader of the Labour Party from 1983 to 1992, said:

> Salman Rushdie's rights as an author are absolute and ought to be inalienable.... But the idea that we all have a duty to applaud his calculated assault is a novel interpretation of the liberal obligation. The proposition that Muslims are welcome in Britain if, and only if, they stop behaving like Muslims is incompatible with the principles of a free society. Indeed that proposition can only be described as racist.[98]

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[96] Ibid, p. 26.

[97] Ibid, p. 30.

[98] Ibid.

Except that a free society always puts limits on freedom. As Geoffrey Wheatcroft points out, a Roman Catholic is free to abstain from birth control but not to burn heretics. Similarly, a Muslim is free to practice his religion, but not to execute apostates.[99]

Whatever the tenor and quality of opinions expressed by Professor Dummett and Roy Hattersley, debate during the Rushdie affair devolved again and again onto the issue of immigrants and immigration. The views of Sir Stephen Spender, another intellectual on the right, were representative of a large segment of the British public. Writing in **The Spectator**, Sir Stephen rubbed more salt in the wounds opened by the affair:

> It is mass migration that has got [Rushdie] into the trouble in which he now finds himself... Democracy is threatened in many countries now by immigration...partly because the immigrants themselves are by no means always upholders of democracy.[100]

In the bitter row occasioned by **The Satanic Verses** and the *fatwa*, it is not surprising that the Western mass media reflected back the anti-immigrant sentiment, the tribalism, and the xenophobia which were being given such frank expression. What is surprising is that all pretence to journalistic objectivity was abandoned, and no equally sustained effort was made to address the reasons for the protests, much less the ambitious vision of the novel itself. But this last would not have surprised Edward Said at all. As he wrote in **Covering Islam**:

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[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid, p. 24.

> I have not been able to discover any period in European and American history since the Middle Ages in which Islam was generally discussed *outside* a framework created by passion, prejudice, and political interests.[101]

Said made his observation nearly ten years before the Rushdie affair, but the interim saw little change in the attitude of the Western media toward Islam. Mirza Tahir Ahmad wonders in his book, **Murder in the Name of Allah**, if the current attitude toward Islam and Muslims is "the old wine of the Orientalists' venom... served up in new goblets?"[102]

The venom dished out by the media was the product of a pack journalism which ignored history and the conduct of the West with regard to the Islamic world. At the time, the Rushdie affair representated merely the latest phase in a longstanding conflict with Islam. For the sake of brevity, let us consider Western imperialist involvement, just in Iran, just in recent times.

Britain most notably intervened in Iran's domestic affairs in 1921, when, in order to secure a source of oil for the Royal Navy, it supported Colonel

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[101] Edward Said, **Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World**, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), p. 23.

[102] Richard Webster, **A Brief History of Blasphemy: Liberalism, Censorship, and The Satanic Verses**, (Suffolk: Orwell Press, 1990), p. 141.

Raza Khan in his successful usurpation of the throne from the Qajar Dynasty. The new shah, the first of the Pahlavis, was a Westernizing despot whose mission was to destroy Iran's Semitic heritage and take it back to what he imagined were its Aryan roots.

Reza Shah was forced into exile in 1941, at a time when he was moving closer to Hitler and losing the support of the British. His son, Muhammad Reza, seized power in a coup financed and managed by the CIA. Iran became a client state of the US and, not coincidentally, a cruel tyranny. Internally, the Iranian state was sustained by the murderous SAVAK and externally, by the CIA and US support. The benefits of such a system accrued to US oil companies--which enjoyed 200% increases in profits--and, again not coincidentally, to the private coffers of the Pahlavi family.[103]

For the vast majority of Iranians who did not benefit, all manifestations of American wealth and power must have caused unbearable resentment. It was relatively easy for a charismatic personality such as Khomeini to mobilize popular support for a revolution that would bring greater tyranny and repression. Among the tactics deployed by Khomeini was a ritual demonization of the West, most particularly of *Amrika*, which he called the "Great Satan." The Western mass media reacted reflexively, with all the historical baggage of contempt. They in turn demonized Khomeini and his followers, thus by extension, Iranians, Islam, and Muslims in general. The following excerpt, written in Feruary 1989 in an English paper called **The Star**, offers a startling example of this modern yet profoundly retrogressive demonization:

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[103] Historical background taken from Webster, pp. 138-139, and Said, p. 110.

> Isn't the world getting sick of the ranting that pours non-stop from the disgusting foam-flecked lips of the Ayatollah Khomeini? Clearly this Muslim cleric is stark raving mad. And more dangerous than a rabid dog. Surely the tragedy is that millions of his misguided and equally potty followers believe every word of hatred he hisses through his yellow-stained teeth. The terrifying thing is not that a lot of these crackpots actually live here among us in Britain, but that we are actually becoming frightened of them. The whole thing is crazy and it has got to stop.[104]

On the scale of bigotry, this jeering philippic is not far removed from the plummy Oxbridge tones of Messrs. Waugh, Worsthorne, and Sir Stephen. Similar attitudes, present in all classes of society, were evident in the media throughout the Rushdie affair.

The Muslim world considers the hostility of the Western media extremely threatening. Akbar S. Ahmed calls its activities in the Islamic world an "invasion," and pointedly writes that powerful organizations such as CNN and the BBC are the "stormtroopers" of Western media, who have launched an offensive against Islam from "Marakesh to Kuala Lumpur."[105] He might have added that the offensive is also against Muslims in Europe and the Americas. The offensive is all the more effective because many Muslims live in conditions of poverty unimaginable to the opinion-makers of the West. In the 18th century, there were three great Islamic empires in the world. By the dawn of the 20th, there was only one left and it was being called "the sick man of Europe."

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[104] Quoted in Webster, p. 139.

[105] Ahmed, p. 259.

The Qur'an enjoins Muslims to prosper, to help their families and fellow citizens, and in this the dispossessed faithful know that they have failed. An Arab proverb says, "Kill me but do not mock my faith." Faith is all that the mass of the Muslim poor have, even those in a rich society like Britain, because they are reeling from the effects of marginalization and unemployment. Today, their mullahs tell them that even their faith is threatened by the "Great Satan" and its allies.[106] The sad truth is that if Muslims require proof of what they are told, they need look no farther than the nearest television.

The media offensive was based on an abysmal ignorance of -- among many other matters -- the religious and cultural debates prevalent in the Muslim world. Ignorance caused the West to accept fundamentalist notions of what it is to be a Muslim. Thus were the voices of the moderate traditionalist -- who insisted that Rushdie be at least tried before any sentencing -- drowned, to say nothing of the voices of radical dissent, such as those raised by the group

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[106] The proverb and discussion of the faith of the Muslim poor is from Iranian journalist Amir Taheri's column, "Khomeini's Scapegoat," which first appeared in the **Times of London**, 13 February 1989, and is reprinted in Appignanesi and Maitland, pp. 87 - 91.

Women Against Fundamentalism. Western public opinion also remained oblivious to the illegality of the *fatwa*, and to the fact that it flouted the *sharia* in several important ways.[107]

Ignorance of Islamic law, norms and practices misled no less an authority than the Vatican to denounce Rushdie as a blasphemer. For his part, John Cardinal O'Connor opined that reading **The Satanic Verses** would be "very foolish."[108] Surreally enough, the Vatican ended up siding with Khomeini, a Muslim tyrant, after it had spent centuries reviling good and decent Muslims.

The *Kulturkampf* occasioned by the Rushdie affair was between, as Homi Bhabha wrote, "the cultural imperatives of Western liberalism and fundamentalist interpretations of Islam, both of which seem to claim an abstract universal authority."[109] We come thus in a circular fashion back to Eliade's notion of the two incompatible poles of experience, the sacred and the profane, which divide people and offer no hope of mediation. As we have seen, the *Kulturkampf* included and divided people of all kinds of social classes and ethnic backgrounds, of all kinds of ideological and religious affiliations. What the *Kulturkampf* most singularly did not include, however, was the text of the novel itself.

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[107] For a discussion of the illegality of the *fatwa* according to Islamic law, see Pipes, pp. 87 - 93, and Fischer and Abedi, p. 399.

[108] Wheatcroft, p. 30. Rushdie was denounced in ***L'Osservatore Romano.***

[109] Homi Bhabha, writing in the **New Statesman**, March 3, 1989. Reprinted in Appignanesi and Maitland, p. 112 - 114.

Analyzing **The Satanic Verses** to see what happens when a profane doubt is used to question a sacred certainty will be the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Writers and Whores: The Death of Satire

William Montgomery Watt relates a famous story about the conquest of Alexandria in 641. The Arab commander of the conquering army wrote to the caliph in Medina to ask what was to be done with the great library of Alexandria. "If the books are in accord with the Koran," he was told, "they are unnecessary and may be destroyed; if they contradict the Koran, they are dangerous, and must be destroyed."[110] The story, from a Muslim source and used again by Edward Gibbon in his history, is now accepted as apocryphal. The famous library was burned, in successive stages, by the Romans. Nonetheless, as Watt points out, the story does reveal a deeper truth about attitudes which have prevailed among Muslim scholars through the centuries: the ulema, official Islam's scholarly authorities, prize knowledge for its moral and religious qualities. Knowledge, they agree, finds its apotheosis in the Qur'an and hadith. All other knowledge is superfluous and sometimes downright dangerous. Again, according to Watt, suspicion of other forms of knowledge is so deeply ingrained among the ulema that they have tried through the centuries to prevent Muslims from even becoming aware of false and heretical doctrines. The underlying assumption of the ulema is that ordinary people cannot tell the difference between truth and lies. Watt ventures that the ulema's efforts to suppress heterodox ideas are a direct result of knowing that the truth of revelation is not supported by reason. Rather, revelation is upheld by miracles vouchsafed by God to the Prophet who in turn proclaims the revelation.[111] If sacred revelation cannot be supported by reasoned argument -- which, as a product of the human mind, is axiomatically profane -- then there is indeed no reconciling the sacred with the profane.

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[110] Watt, William Montgomery. **Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions**, (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 41.

Fear of contamination by heterodox opinions and heretical doctrines goes a long way toward explaining why the story of the satanic verses was suppressed. Couple this fear with the general disdain for and mistrust of books which are not the Book, and it is possible to gain additional insight into the campaign to have Salman Rushdie's novel banned.

Sometimes with terrible sadness, sometimes with ribald satire, **The Satanic Verses** questions the orthodoxies of religion and the sanctities of religious revelation: in other words, and in the finest sense, the novel profanes the sacred. The incident of the satanic verses, as revived by Rushdie, dramatizes the kind of ethical dilemma prophets must face in the real world. The heresy that Muhammad might have actually used the satanic verses is unanimously rejected, but the existence of the story in so many classical and scholarly sources suggests that -- at one point and however briefly -- the

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[111] Ibid., p. 42.

Prophet was faced with a real temptation.[112] Rushdie's blasphemy consists of showing the Prophet to be human and of waging a very human struggle in his heart over the advantages and disadvantages of accepting a henotheist compromise. Nor is the denouement of the satanic verses incident entirely a fabrication of Rushdie's. When Khalid the waterbearer says to Mahound, "you brought us the Devil himself, so that we could witness the workings of the Evil One and his overthrow by the Right," (p. 125) he is echoing Qur'anic wisdom that Muhammad, like all Muslims, is put through a trial so that he and other mortals might experience the ways in which God teaches.[113] Moreover, the idea of a human and therefore fallible Prophet has long been expressed in counter-doctrinal arguments within Islamic tradition.[114] According to these arguments, Muhammad was only a mortal and could make honest mistakes in the recitation, of which the satanic verses are an example. Another possibility suggested was that Muhammad, hungry for revelation when none was forthcoming, was tricked by Satan into uttering the verses. Yet another is that Muhammad fell victim to his own wishful thinking, allowing Satan to intercede at an opportune moment.[115]

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[112] Fischer and Abedi, pp. 408 - 409, and Watt, p. 115. Watt discusses the satanic verses as recorded by al-Tabari. Unlike Sardar and Davis, who dismiss Tabari as a "compendium maker," Watt writes that he was a careful scholar, who would not have taken the satanic verses story from a dubious source.

[113] Fischer and Abedi, p. 411.

[114] Ibid., p. 410.

[115] Fischer and Abedi (pp. 409 - 411) cite the speculations of several Muslim scholars about why the satanic verses exist in the historical record. Some are

The Satanic Verses plays with several possibilities by showing Mahound to be an initially dithering and morally ambivalent figure. The novel then develops the counter-doctrinal suggestion that the Prophet indulged in wishful thinking even further by portraying Mahound himself as the heresiarch, if only briefly and in a moment of weakness. So strong was Mahound's desire to have the faith succeed in Jahilia, that he put his will above the will of God. Or, in another possible reading of the satanic verses incident, that he convinced himself that his will *was* the will of God. Once he changed his mind, it was convenient for Mahound -- who now had to save face, salve his conscience, and reassure his followers -- to lay the blame squarely on the devil.

Having dramatized the invention and subsequent abrogation of the satanic verses, Rushdie sets the foundation for exploring the nature of faith. As the poet Baal puts it in one of Gibreel's dreams:

> Mahound, any new idea is asked two questions. When it's weak, will it compromise? We know the answer to that one. And now Mahound, on your return to Jahilia, time for the second question: How do you behave when you win? When your enemies are at your mercy and your power has become absolute, what then? (P. 369)

The Satanic Verses repeatedly asks of the nascent faith, *What kind of idea are you?* The novel sets about exploring this question on all levels -- from

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psychological, pertaining to the character of the Prophet, while others are based on doctrinal, scriptural -- that is to say, pertaining to the text of the Qur'an -- or historical arguments. I have included only a few of the psychological possibilities.

metanarrative to intranarrative -- through the agency of writers and satire. Baal asks his version of the question in the chapter "Return to Jahilia," which resumes the story of the faith twenty-five years after the failure of the satanic verses and Mahound's ensuing, humiliating flight from Jahilia. Mahound, strong now, and victorious, returns to Jahilia to consolidate his power and make Jahilians Submit, on pain of death. The only Jahilians who do not prostrate themselves before Mahound are Baal and his prostitute wives.

When the Prophet Muhammad returned victorious to Mecca, he promised clemency to everyone who embraced Islam. Of the handful of people he did order executed, two were writers and two were actresses who had performed in satirical plays. "Now there," Rushdie said in an interview, "you have an image that I thought was worth exploring." He continued:

> "At the very beginning of Islam you find a conflict between the sacred text and the profane text, between revealed literature and imagined literature. For a writer that conflict was fascinating to explore. So that's what I was doing, exploring."[116]

Rushdie's statement segues neatly into a restatement of the question introduced at the conclusion of the Chapter Two: What happens when profane doubt is used to question sacred certainty? In Rushdie's terms, the question may be rewritten: What happens when a profane text sets out to explore a sacred one? However the question is formulated, it will elicit a response about two very different subjects. One subject has already been discussed in some detail: the cultural phenomenon which was the Rushdie affair, a series of complex and interconnected events motivated by passionate, conflicting beliefs and observed from many disparate points of view. While the events comprising the Rushdie affair began, as we saw in Chapter One, even before the publication of **The Satanic Verses**, they were based largely on a few decontextualized bits and pieces of the novel.

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[116] .Appignanesi and Maitland, p. 23. From an interview with Salman Rushdie for *The Bandung File*. The interview was recorded on 27 January 1989 and

The other subject is the novel itself, which was engulfed by the storm of its own publication. To answer properly the question of the encroachment of the profane upon the sacred -- whether by confrontation or by exploration -- it is important to consider the text of **The Satanic Verses**, and, by so doing, provide a context and a recontextualized forum for discussion. This chapter will argue that satire -- vital, irreverent, questioning and profane satire -- is inimical to unexamined and hidebound expressions of faith, and for that very reason, it is necessary.

The Rushdie affair dramatized in real life the major themes explored in **The Satanic Verses**: immigration, religious, social, and political constructions of community, and, most prominently, the confrontation between revelation and literature, between the sacred and the profane modes of existence. The novel itself is a story of stories. Of its nine chapters, five are set in the here and now and deal directly with the pressures of being an immigrant in

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broadcast on February 14, 1989, on Channel 4.

Thatcherite Britain. Alternating between them are four chapters which recount Gibreel Farishta's dreams: the substance of and reason for his increasing psychosis. It is also in these chapters that the origins, nature, and uses and abuses of faith are explored. To construct our argument, this thesis will now examine the four chapters in the order in which they appear in the novel: "Mahound," "Ayesha," "Return to Jahilia," and "The Parting of the Arabian Sea."

Recurring throughout the four chapters with an almost nagging insistence is the question, "What kind of idea are you?" The question has its roots in Gibreel's waking life. From childhood, the actor grew up believing in "God, angels, demons, djinns as matter of factly as if they were bullock-carts or lamp-posts." (P. 22) To offset the loneliness attending his long climb from a life of poverty and drudgery, the actor became an "omnivorous autodidact" (p. 23) who devoured

> the metamorphic myths of Greece and Rome, the avatars of Jupiter, the boy who became a flower, the spider-woman, Circe, everything; and the theosophy of Annie Besant, and unified field theory, and the incident of the Satanic Verses in the early career of the Prophet, and the politics of Muhammad's harem after his return to Mecca in triumph... (P. 24)

Even back then, Gibreel was subject to unsettling dreams in which he was "tormented by women of unbearable sweetness and beauty." (P. 24)

Gibreel got his big career-making break in a genre of Bombay movies known as the "theological." As other roles in theologicals followed, Gibreel found himself portraying Hindu gods in one blockbuster after another.

So, Gibreel Farishta -- who after all did name himself after the Angel Gibreel for reasons of showbusiness -- soared to superstardom. As he did so, his "phenomenal success deepened his belief in a guardian angel." (P. 25)

The background, character and spiritual preoccupations of Gibreel Farishta are established near the beginning of **The Satanic Verses**. One day, at the apogee of his fame, the actor faints. He is rushed to a hospital where he lies dying while doctors remain perplexed by his illness. "It is a freak mystery," says a hospital spokesman. "Call it if you please an Act of God." (P. 28)

Gibreel Farishta haemorrhages, bleeding to death inside his own skin. He spends "every second of every minute" that he is conscious calling out to God. "Ya Allah, show me some sign," he pleads, "some small sign or mark of your favour so that I may find within myself the strength to cure my ills." (P. 30) God's silence makes Gibreel conclude that he is being punished and he suffers, for a time, in silence. Finally, in anger and torment, Gibreel thinks, "Enough God, why must I die when I have not killed?" Then he forms the question in his consciousness for the first time: "Are you vengeance or are you love?" (P. 30) As it happens, Gibreel's anger gives way to a "terrible emptiness and isolation" as he realizes that he is talking to "thin air," that there is nobody there at all. He begins then to plead, "Ya Allah, just be there, damn it, just be." (P. 30) Again, Gibreel feels "nothing, nothing, nothing" until one day he finds that he doesn't need to feel anything. This feeling of nothingness marks a "metamorphosis" and proves to be the antidote to his illness. Shortly after his recovery and to prove to himself the nonexistence of God, he walks into a hotel dining room where he fills his nothingness with "the gammon steaks of his unbelief and the pigs trotters of secularism." (P. 29) "'Don't you get it?'" he shouts. "'No thunderbolt. That's the point.'" (P. 30) Eventually, however, Gibreel Farishta pays dearly for his trangression, for it is after he flouts God that the retribution begins: "a nocturnal retribution, a punishment of dreams." (P. 32) It does not take long for the void within Gibreel to be filled with a powerful yearning to know. He embarks, if only subconsciously, upon a spiritual quest to be reunited with a just and loving God: to be restored, in other words, to the beliefs he once held as true. Gibreel's keen desire for a psychologically whole and continuous self makes him the victim of dreams which plague him every time he succumbs to sleep. The dreams possess narrative wholeness and have a peculiarly serial quality which comes naturally to the seasoned movie actor. As Gibreel explains to Saladin Chamcha, "'Everytime I go to sleep the dream starts up from where it stopped... As if somebody just paused the video while I went out of the room.'" (P. 83) And then the reader receives the first indication that the dreams are gradually assuming control of Gibreel's psyche: "'Or, or: As if he's the guy who's awake and this is the bloody nightmare. His bloody dream: us. Here. All of it.'" (P. 83) "He" is the Archangel Gibreel, whom the actor plays from dream to dream. "'Who knows if angels sleep, never mind dream,'" Gibreel continues. "'Do I sound crazy or what?'" (P. 83)

Whatever havoc the role of the Archangel wreaks upon Gibreel's mental health, it is a role for which he is a natural. His existence as a pampered and wealthy movie star places him well above the grimy streets of his origins. Gibreel lives in an aerie, the penthouse of a luxury apartment known as Everest Villas, on Malabar Hill, "the highest home in the highest building on the highest ground in the city." (P. 13) Though he is physically above the pullulating masses of Bombay, Gibreel's conduct is far from angelic. His amorous conquests are legion, but he carries on a longer-term, if desultory, affair with Rekha Merchant, a married businesswoman and mother of two who lives in the apartment below. On the day he recovers from his illness, Gibreel meets Alleluia Cone, who he decides is the love of his life. He disappears without a trace from his life in Bombay to find Allie in London. Gibreel leaves without explanation, but does leave a note in his apartment for the police to find: *We are creatures of air, Our roots in dreams And clouds, reborn in flight. Goodbye.* The devastated Rekha interprets Gibreel's note as a command to fly and hurls herself and her two children off the roof of Everest Villas. She returns to exert a greater control over Gibreel in death than she ever could in life.

Rekha visits Gibreel for the first time as he plummets from the hijacked plane. "'Bastard,'" she says to him. "'Now that I am dead, I have forgotten how to forgive. I curse you, my Gibreel, may your life be hell." (P. 8) Gibreel then hears the verses for the first time, "soft, sibilant," in a language he does not understand, but in which he can make out the name "Al-Lat," repeated again and again. Rekha continues to visit Gibreel -- not in his dreams, but at the worst, most delusional moments of his life -- to taunt him and to exult in his torment. The curse of a heartbroken woman is Gibreel's punishment: it dogs him through his dreams, throughout his escalating psychosis, to his dying day.

Gibreel Farishta's dreams about the origins, nature and progress of faith can best be understood within the context of desire -- to regain God -- and punishment -- the curse of Rekha Merchant, and also, the retribution Gibreel visits upon himself because he is an unbeliever. Together, the motifs of desire and punishment unite the dream chapters into a grand narrative and integrate them thematically with the rest of the novel.

The Satanic Verses became controversial for, among other things, its revival of the satanic verses incident, which occurs in the dream chapter, "Mahound." There were, however, two ancillary complaints linked to this chapter: choosing the ancient pejorative name "Mahound" for the dream prophet who founds the faith, and calling Ibrahim a "bastard." These complaints will be addressed within a consideration of the chapter as a whole.

"Mahound" begins with Gibreel dreaming stories and events which take place long before the lifetime of the eponymous prophet. Gibreel's dreams afflict him during times of personal crisis. They first come to him during the 111 days he is held captive by fanatic highjackers on the grounded plane. The immediately striking feature of these dreams is how closely they cleave to Islamic tradition and history. As hard as he tries not to sleep, Gibreel inevitably "slides heavy-lidded towards the visions of his angeling." (P. 91) He sees his mother who used to call him "shaitan" for his mischievous ways and also "farishta" because he was her darling angel. In the first dream, Gibreel falls like Shaitan and the falling turns into angelic flight as he soars up to the horizon, "his arms around the sun." (P. 91)

The higher Gibreel soars, the further back into the past he sees, beginning with the fall of Shaitan. He sees Shaitan and his daughters, Lat, Manat and Uzza, and he hears the verses that they sing. He sees Hagar and her baby being abandoned in the desert by Ibrahim and he flies down as the angel to show her the spring from which she and Ismail may drink to live. Again, time moves on and Gibreel sees the ancestors of the businessman and finally the businessman himself, on his 44th birthday, making his way up Cone Mountain.

The Prophet Muhammad was a successful businessman who was in the habit of secluding himself on Mount Hira, to think, to meditate, and, not incidentally, to receive the revelation. The birthday of the businessman Gibreel sees is also significant since Muhammad began to receive the revelation when he was forty. The dream businessman is given a "dream name, changed by the vision:" (P. 93)

> Here he is neither Mahomet nor MoeHammered; has adopted instead the demon-tag the farangis hung around his neck. To turn insults into strengths, whigs, tories, Blacks all chose to wear with pride the name they were given in scorn; likewise, our mountain-climbing, prophet-motivated solitary is to be the medieval baby-frightener, the Devil's synonym:

Mahound. (P. 93)

Rushdie's choice of the name "Mahound" for the dream prophet turns tables on Occidental commentators on Islam who once used the name to denigrate and demonize Muhammad and, by association, Muslims. But there is another reason for so naming the prophet which is counterdiscursive to the one made explicit in the text. Rushdie uses the distinction between "Mahound" and "Muhammad" to emphasize moral and immoral uses of faith.[117] Mahound, we know, is not above using the revelation to his advantage. The attentive reader, familiar with literary tropes, will recognize in Mahound a metaphor for the Muhammad of Khomeini, General Zia-ul-Haq, the Taliban and others who misuse the power of the state in the name of Islam.[118]

Mahound "looks as he should, high forehead, eaglenose, broad in the shoulder, narrow in the hip. Average height, brooding..."(P. 93) The description of Mahound replicates faithfully the physical likeness of Muhammad as found in the historical record.[119] While the two are mirror images of one another, it is important to remember that mirrors reverse everything. It is possible, indeed, necessary, as this thesis argues, to read Mahound as a dopplegänger and corruption of Muhammad. The literary character and the Prophet are two distinct entities. "Mahound" is not merely a name for the historical Prophet.

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[117] Fischer and Abedi, p. 414.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Compare the description in **The Satanic Verses** with the following: "Muhammad, according to some apparently authentic accounts, was of average height or a little above average. His chest and shoulders were broad, and altogether he was of sturdy build.... (He) had a hooked nose and large black eyes..." Even the personal proclivit[illegible] Rushdie attributes to Mahound are cited by Watt: a brooding nature, a rapid, agile walk.

William Montgomery Watt, **Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman**, (Oxford University Press: London, 1961), p. 229.

At roughly the same time as Mahound makes his first appearance in Gibreel's dream, another voice irrupts into the narrative and takes it over. The new narrative voice never identifies itself directly but is fond of dropping tantalizing, rather piquant hints. It elucidates the central theme of **The Satanic Verses**: the opposition between the sacred and the profane.

> Question: what is the opposite of faith? Not disbelief.
> Too final, certain, closed. Itself a kind of belief.
> Doubt. (P. 92)

The human condition, the voice argues, is one of doubt. Angels, on the other hand, are easily pacified and controlled:

> Human being are tougher nuts, can doubt anything, even the evidence of their own eyes. Of behind-their-own eyes. Of what, as they sink heavy-lidded transpires behind closed peepers... angels, they don't have much in the way of a will. To will is to disagree; not to submit, to dissent.
> I know; devil talk. Shaitan interrupting Gibreel.
> Me? (P. 92)

The voice is making a couple of points in these, the introductory paragraphs of the dream chapter "Mahound" that are worth elaborating. First, it suggests in a ludic spirit worthy of the wiliest trickster that it is in fact the devil Shaitan. Second, it avers that the dream Archangel is its plaything, thus auguring tragedy for Gibreel Farishta, the doubting, dreaming human being.

It is the voice which calls Ibrahim a bastard:

> While Mahound climbs Coney, Jahilia celebrates a different anniversary. In ancient time the patriarch Ibrahim came into this valley with Hagar and Ismail their son. Here in this waterless wilderness he abandoned her. She asked him, can this be God's will? He replied it is. And left, the bastard. From the beginning, men used God to justify the unjustifiable. He moves in mysterious ways: men say. Small wonder, then, the women have turned to me. (P. 95)

Rushdie's critics argued that his excoriation of Ibrahim merely continued the disrespect of calling Muhammad "Mahound." As Fischer and Abedi point out, however, the novel is making a far subtler point. It is indeed a given of commonly accepted morality that a man does not abandon his wife and child to die.[120] But the narrative voice also asks why pilgrims gather at the site of Hagar's betrayal:

> To celebrate her survival? No, no. They are celebrating the honour done the valley by the visit of, you've guessed it, Ibrahim. In that loving consort's name, they gather, worship, and above all, spend. (P. 95)

Insofar as the pilgrims to the dream city of Jahilia – pre-Islamic, polytheistic and idol-worshipping -- are stand-ins for Muslims *hajjis*, Rushdie makes the point that most Muslims do not celebrate the survival of Hagar -- that is, the simultaneous dependence on God and on one's own skill and reason -- rather, they worship, idolatrously, the footprint of Ibrahim.[121]

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[120] Fischer and Abedi, p. 415. Hagar was Ibrahim's servant, but the baby was

Fundamentalist critics did not and could not appreciate Rushdie's paraphrase of a feminist criticism of traditional Muslim notions of male supremacy. Neither would they admit that the satirical treatment of the pilgrims' practices is a criticism of unquestioned faith, a product of rote learning and ritual.

In addition to the satirical asides provided by the narrative voice, satire is introduced overtly as a theme at the diegetic level through the agency of the poet Baal. Known as a trenchant and biting satirist, Baal takes his vocation seriously. When Abu Simbel, the Grandee of Jahilia, threatens to pull Baal's teeth, both literal and figurative, Baal ripostes, "'For every one you pull out, a stronger one will grow, biting deeper, drawing hotter spurts of blood.'"

"'You like the taste of blood,'" observes the Grandee.

"'A poet's work,' answers Baal. 'To name the unnameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep.'" (P. 97)

Jahilia offers a welcome and lucrative home to poets and Baal is

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his. The point remains valid.

[121] Ibid., p. 416.

pre-eminent among them. Rival tribes, chiefs and traders commission poets and minstrels to perform "vicious satires, vitriolic odes" against one another. They also perform odes to gods and godesses, hunting, adventure, love and heartbreak to the delight of pilgrims who throw coins at the performers' feet. Jahilia is a rich, polyvocal concert of criticism and opinion, of dissent and difference. Into this polyvocality comes Mahound with his relentless monody of "one one one," and so, the Grandee has no intention of pulling out Baal's teeth as long as the poet is useful against Mahound.

To the Grandee, Baal's sexual dalliance with his wife Hind is but her passing fancy. He knows whom he must really fight. He commands Baal to write verses discrediting Mahound and his followers. "'Grandee, those *goons* -- those fucking *clowns*?'" Baal is incredulous. "'You don't have to worry about them. What do you think? That Mahound's one God will bankrupt your temples? Three-sixty versus one, and the one wins? Can't happen.'" (P. 101)

Having seen the tenacity and conviction of Mahound's followers, however, the Grandee is far less sanguine. Just as the character Baal is used at the diegetic level to thematize satire, so the character of the Grandee is used to thematize the blending and co-existence of the sacred and the profane:

> At the recommendation of Abu Simbel, the rulers of Jahilia have added to their religious practices the tempting spices of profanity. The city has become famous for its licentiousness, as a gambling den, a whorehouse, a place of bawdy songs and wild loud music... (P. 103)

Abu Simbel became the wealthiest and most powerful man in Jahilia by being able to see the trends and profit from them. He worries about Mahound not on religious grounds for he is not a moralizer. The Grandee is a pragmatist. He, correctly, sees Mahound and his retinue as a threat to the status quo, to everything he has amassed, to a multiplicitous life which is relatively peaceful for all, even if at times corrupt and chaotic. Regardless of the 360 gods that are worshipped, Jahilia is profane, a culture and a society every bit as dynamic and imperfect as its human creators.

The Grandee realizes instinctively that Mahound cannot be defeated, cetainly not by a versifier. "Here is another great lie:" he thinks, "the pen is mightier than the sword." (P. 102)

"*What kind of idea am I?*" Abu Simbel asks himself. "I bend. I sway. I calculate the odds, trim my sails, manipulate, survive." (P. 102) His solution for a peaceful co-existence with Mahound is to effect a compromise. "'Send a messenger to the house of the kahin Mahound,'" the Grandee commands a servant. "*We will set him a little test. A fair contest: three against one.*" (P. 104)

After Mahound offers the compromising revelation, his desolate followers weep their misery. Mahound himself returns home and paces the inner courtyard "in a random sequence of unconscious geometrics, his footsteps tracing out a series of ellipses, trapeziums, rhomboids, ovals, rings." (P. 118) Mahound's wife Khadija observes Mahound and reflects on their life together.

She recalls how Mahound would return from the caravan trails with stories about the prophet Isa born to the maid Maryam. He would argue that the old nomadic ways were better than life in Jahilia, "a city of gold where people exposed their daughters in the wilderness. In the old tribes even the poorest orphan would be cared for." (P. 118)

"'God is in the desert,' Mahound would say, 'not here in this miscarriage of a place.'" (P. 118)

Now that Mahound has compromised, however, his increasingly agitated internal peregrinations find expression in his pacing, his tracing of "pentagons, parallelograms, six-pointed stars...in abstract and increasingly labyrinthine paterns...as though unable to find a simple line." (P. 119)

It is the redoubtable Hind who shows him the simple line. Mahound leaves his house and walks in anguish through the "corrupt city." The stresses of the day, the anger of his disciples, and Mahound's own doubt take their toll and Mahound collapses. Hind finds Mahound and brings him home. "'Fainted,' she murmurs. 'That's weakness, Mahound. Are you becoming weak?'" (P. 120) Hind continues,

> "Don't say anything, Mahound. I am the Grandee's wife and neither of us is your friend. My husband however is a weak man. In Jahilia they think he's cunning but I know better. He knows that I take lovers but he does nothing about it because the temples are in my family's care. Lat's, Uzza's, Manat's. The -- shall I call them *mosques* -- of your new angels." (P. 120)

Thus does Hind salt Mahound's wounds. She chides him, "'You shouldn't have done what you did.'" But shaming Mahound is only part of Hind's strategy. She reminds him that she is his equal, just as Al-Lat is the equal of Allah. She hints that Abu Simbel may not keep his word, but that, regardless of the outcome of the deal between the two, "'between Allah and the Three, there can be no peace. I don't want it. I want the fight. To the death, that's the kind of idea I am. What kind are you?'" (P. 121)

The Satanic Verses is a densely textured novel which lends itself to a variety of interpretations. It is to the credit of the novel's complexity and sophistication that Mahound, having regained the simple line of conviction which will lead to the abrogation of the compromising verses, emerges as an even more morally tarnished figure. It is the uncompromising vision of Hind which returns Mahound to the path of righteousness. At this critical juncture of the narrative, Mahound's thoughts and motives are opaque. The point-of-view shifts to the dreaming Gibreel who recounts, in first-person narrative, the epic wrestling match the Archangel and Mahound have in Mahound's quest for revelation. "He's twice as physically fit as I am and four times as knowledgeable minimum..." thinks Gibreel. (P. 122) Finally, Mahound throws the fight and is pinned beneath the angel. In the dreaming of the dream, Gibreel tells us:

> It's what he wanted because archangels can't lose such fights, it wouldn't be right, it's only devils who get beaten in such circs, so the moment I get on top, Mahound started weeping for joy and did his old trick, forcing my mouth to open and making the voice, the

> Voice, pour out of me once again, made it pour all
> over him, like sick. (P. 123)

Two things are clear from Gibreel's telling: first, that the dream Archangel is a fraud and second, that the prophet he dreams is also a fraud. But the larger point made by the episode of the revelation is that human beings can have no direct experience of the divine. No matter how ardent his quest, no matter how earnest his desire to feel even a passing intimation of God, Gibreel is lost in the device of a false prophet who conjures up a false archangel. The profane can never know the sacred. Mortals must content themselves with pale simulacra of the divine: idols, the mediation of prophets, the preaching of clerics. It is through the will of their own hearts and minds that they summon the faith they need, in the same way that Mahound summons an angel to give him what he needs.

After Mahound abrogates the verses, Abu Simbel authorizes the persecution of those-who-submit. The oasis of Yathrib offers the faithful asylum. They leave "almost empty handed...on this first day of the first year of the new beginning of Time." (P. 125) The hegira begins. Mahound will one day return victorious to Jahilia, but for now, Baal has the last word: "*What kind of idea / does 'Submission' seem today? / One full of fear. / An idea that runs away.*" (P. 126) In an actor's dream, the Archangel is left alone on a mountaintop where he is tormented by the three winged goddesses. Unlike Mahound, Gibreel "has no devil to repudiate: Dreaming, he cannot wish them away." (P. 126)

The chapter "Mahound" delineates oppositions which will be explored further in Gibreel's remaining dreams. First, there is the opposition of satire, as personified by Baal, and faith, or if you will, of irreverence and reverence. One of the sharpest criticisms against Rushdie was that he mocked that which should never be mocked. Second, there is the opposition between the sacred and the profane, as personified by Abu Simbel. Jahilia integrated the two modes of existence but that is because the sacred was profaned. The shrine was a tourist attraction and also, because of the very multiplicity of gods, no one Voice could claim universal authority. Here we come to the third opposition: that between the multiplicitous and the one, between polyvocality and univocality. Fourth, there is the opposition between the male and the female. The mortal battle between Mahound and Hind reflects the struggle between Allah and Al-Lat. The opposition between the male and the femal leads to the fifth opposition: that between feminist and traditional discourses and commentaries about Islam. In varying permutations and combinations, the remaining dream chapters will mine these oppositions but they will follow the lead of the chapter "Mahound" by doing so within the context of serious questions about the fallibility and trustworthiness of prophets and about the sanctity of revelation.

The second and fourth of the dream chapters are "Ayesha" and "The Parting of the Arabian Sea." They transport Gibreel away from developments in Jahilia and Yathrib. Both chapters may be read as parables about the consequences of religious zeal. They tell the story of Ayesha, a charismatic mystic who is believed to be a kahin, a messenger, by the people of her village. She leads the villagers on foot to the Arabian Sea, the waters of which, they are convinced, will part, whereupon they will journey gloriously to Mecca.

The chapter "Ayesha" is in two parts, juxtaposing Ayesha's religious demagoguery with that of a character known as "the Imam." It is with his story that the chapter begins. The Imam is a gloriously rich and pointed parody of the Ayatollah Khomeini. He waits out his years of bitter exile, sequestered in a London flat, dreaming of his return to a land he calls, with affecting simplicity, "Desh," his country, his home. The Imam foments revolution through ham radio operators. Broadcasts in his name thunder to the people of Desh:

> "Death to the tyranny of the Empress Ayesha, of calendars, of America, of time! We seek the eternity, the timelessness of God.... Burn the books and trust the Book; shred the papers and hear the Word, as it was revealed by the Angel Gibreel to the messenger Mahound and explicated by your interpreter and Imam." (P. 211)

In addition to time and the Empress, other enemies of the Imam include history and knowledge:

> History the intoxicant, the creation and possession of the Devil, of the great Shaitan, the greatest of lies -- progress, science rights.... History is a deviation from the Path, knowledge is a delusion, because the sum of knowledge was complete on the day Al-Lah finished his revelation to Mahound. (P. 210)

The Imam prepares for his mission by summoning, by "conjuring up" the Archangel Gibreel.

By the time Gibreel dreams "Ayesha," his psychological disorder, though as yet undiagnosed, has advanced. He has survived the fall from the exploded airplane and made his way through London to the refuge of his lover, Allie Cone. Just before he collapses at Allie's feet, however, he realizes his new-found sense of safety is ephemeral: "Rekha has permitted him, for the time being, to reach the illusion of a safe haven so that her triumph over him could be the sweeter when it came at last." (P. 202)

In the new dream, Gibreel is "no angel to look at, just a man in his ordinary street clothes." (P. 211) He stands quaking before the Imam: "'You don't need me,'" he begs the Imam. "'The revelation is complete. Let me go.'" The Imam commands Gibreel to fly him to his metaphorical Jerusalem: "'The fall of the harlot... her crash, the Babylonian whore.'" (P. 212) In a trice, the Imam leaps on Gibreel's shoulders and Gibreel finds himself both flying and flown to a strange land where he discerns "a palace, the palace, her place: the Empress whom radio messages have unmade." (P. 213)

"'Come down. I will show you Love,'" says the Imam. (P. 213) Gibreel sees rivers of people converging upon the palace in an unending stream. The "babbling" and "giggling" of the machine guns of the royal guard turns the people into rivers of blood while pious mothers exhort their sons to "'be a martyr, do the needful, die.'" (P. 213) The carnage continues.

"'You see how they love me,'" says the Imam.

"'This isn't love,' Gibreel replies, weeping. 'It's hate. She has driven them into your arms.'" (P. 213)

As always, the Imam replies with the certainty of his convictions:

> 'We long for the eternal and I am eternity.... After the revolution there will be no clocks.... We shall be born again, all of us the same age in the eyes of Almighty God.' (P. 214)

The unending crowd prevails over the palace guards and the machine guns are silenced. "'Done,'" says the Imam. Having won the battle, he must now win the war. The mighty and terrible Al-Lat bursts from the shell of Empress Ayesha. The Imam and Al-Lat grow to gigantic proportions in preparation for the apocalypse. Gibreel understands that the Imam is "fighting by proxy as usual." But the superior will of the Imam forces Gibreel to fight. Al-Lat falls. The huge and monstrous Imam now lies down in front of the palace, his mouth yawning open. People march obediently in and the Imam swallows them whole. Every clock in Desh begins to chime and chimes on beyond 12. It is the end of time, it is the beginning of the "Untime of the Imam." (P. 215)

In the next dream, Gibreel hopes that the God he once "tried unsuccessfully to kill," may be a "God of love, as well as one of vengeance, power, duty, rules and hate..." (P. 216) Gibreel has cause for optimism. The dream begins in the village of Titlipur where the zamindar Mirza Saeed Akhtar wakes on his 40th birthday to the revelation that he is at peace with the world and blissfully in love with his wife. The village is a familiar yet mythical place, belonging at once to this time with references to ordinary village life in India, the stories of Tagore, to a modern world with medical doctors. Yet, as might be expected of a village built in dreams, it exists at a slight angle to reality. Titlipur is overrun with butterflies. According to village legend, the butterflies are the familiars of a local saint, a holy woman who 120 years ago. The servant women recalled that it had been 19 years since the reappearance of the butterflies.

Ayesha is the 19-year-old orphan who irrevocably shatters Mirza Saeed's halcyon joy on the morning of his 40th birthday. He stands transfixed on his balcony as he watches the beautiful young woman feast on butterflies. In an image reminiscent of the Imam, the butterflies enter willingly into Ayesha's open mouth. Ayesha's sudden epileptic fit prompts Mishal, Mirza Saeed's wife, to have her moved to their bedroom. What follows is a brief history of Ayesha's life in the Muslim village. She makes toys for a living and sells them to a merchant in a nearby town. One day, on a walk back to Titlipur, Ayesha disappeared for about 48 hours. When she returned, she "had attained a kind of agelessness," her hair had turned "white as snow" while her skin had the "luminous perfection of a newborn child." (P. 225) She revealed that the Archangel Gibreel appeared to her in a vision and lay down beside her to rest. "Everything will be required of us," Ayesha tells the alarmed village headman, "and everything will be given to us also." (P. 225)

Gibreel is astonished by Ayesha's news: "the dreamer dreaming, wants (but is unable) to protest. I never laid a finger on her... Damn me if I know where that girl is getting her information/inspiration." (P. 226) As with Mahound and the Imam, Gibreel is no match for Ayesha. There is even a suggestion in the text that Ayesha rapes Gibreel, literally and figuratively:

> The moment her eyes closed he was there beside her, dreaming Gibreel in coat and hat, sweltering in the heat. She looked at him but he couldn't say what she saw, wings, maybe, haloes, the works. Then he was lying there and finding he could not get up, his limbs had become heavier than iron bars, it seemed as if his body might be crushed by its own weight into the earth. When she finished looking at him she nodded, gravely, as if he had spoken, and then she took of her scrap of sari and stretched out beside him nude. Then in the dream he fell asleep, out cold, as if somebody had pulled the plug, and when he dreamed himself awake again she was standing in front of him with that loose white hair and the butterlies clothing her: transformed. She was still nodding, with a rapt expression on her face, receiving a message from somewhere that she called Gibreel. Then she left him lying there and returned to the village to make her entrance.
>
> So now I have a dream-wife, the dreamer becomes conscious enough to think. What the hell to do with her? -- But it isn't up to him. (P. 226)

Like Mahound and the Imam before her, Ayesha gets what she wants. As always, there is a lacuna in the narrative which surrounds the mysterious and ineffable act of revelation. Ayesha claims that the Archangel revealed to her that there is an advanced cancer in Mishal Akhtar's breast. A medical exam proves her correct. Ayesha tells the villagers that the Archangel wants them to walk two hundred miles to the sea, which will part upon his command, allowing them to walk to Mecca. There they must make obeisance to the Black Stone in the Ka'aba at the centre of the sacred mosque. Opposing Ayesha are the profane forces of reason and love:

"'I don't believe in you,'" Mirza Saeed tells Ayesha. "But I'm going to come and will try to end this insanity with every step I take.'" (P. 240)

Meanwhile, Osman, the village clown, asks himself, "'who is the madder... the madwoman or the fool who loves the madwoman?" The story of the *haj* of Titlipur will conclude in "The Parting of the Arabian Sea."

Like that of the dreamer dreaming it, the condition of Jahilia gets appreciably worse in the interval between "Mahound" and "Return to Jahilia." The famous Indian movie producer Whiskey Sisodia convinces Gibreel Farishta to make a public relations appearance to announce an upcoming series of films in which he will star as the Archangel Gibreel. The actor comes off the "heavy drugs" (p. 347) he has been on, in an effort to function normally in the public eye. Gibreel becomes severely delusional while at the gathering of ecstatic film fans and manages to escape undetected by his handlers and bodyguards. Rumours abound within London's Asian population that Gibreel simply levitated away from the scene and "vanished into the blue under his own steam," (p. 352) very like an angel flying away. After this, his second disappearance, Gibreel Farishta attains cult status. Novelty vendors in the Asian enclaves of Brickhall, Wembley and Brixton are quick to capitalize on the new icon by selling haloes (fluorescent plastic hoops) to which are affixed a pair of rubber horns. They soon become a fad. The ambiguity of the Archangel figure and the ambivalence and confusion within Gibreel about his own identity are thus explicitly thematized again: remember that his mother called him both "shaitan" and "farishta." The difference now is that Gibreel is a grown-up with grown-up problems. With cheap novelty items, the popular imagination thus intuits the duality and self-estrangement of the actor's psyche. Gibreel himself wanders disoriented through London, a city which he finds increasingly chaotic and incomprehensible. Again, he collapses at Allie's feet. Soon he is fast asleep. But sleep now is welcome, the dreams are a refuge, because "the real terror" is stalking his waking hours. (P. 356)

The Jahilia Gibreel dreams is a shabby simulacrum of its former glory. "Return to Jahilia" is a densely textured chapter with six episodes. In the opening, the narrator tells us that Jahilia is a "prosaic place, and (like its poets) poor." Its decline is attributed directly to an old foe grown strong. "Mahound's arm has grown long; his power (has) encircled Jahilia, cutting off its life-blood, its pilgrims and caravans." (P. 360) Even the Grandee has acquired a "threadbare look, his white hair as full of gaps as his teeth." (P. 360) Baal at 50 is thickened in body as well as in wit. He shambles back to his hovel through the deserted, crime-infested streets of Jahilia, even the shortest walk inducing in him all the symptoms which are the precursors of a heart attack. Only Hind remains her eternally youthful self and it is she who continues the task of dissenting against Mahound in public, writing hortatory epistles to Jahilians and posting them in every street in town.

The chapter "Return to Jahilia" serves several functions. At the diegetic level, it provides a dénouement for the lives of the principal characters encountered in "Mahound." Basing its episodes on hadith literature, the chapter offers insights about the practice of faith and about the consequences of imposing by force a faith defined by rules and prohibitions. The chapter exposes the schism between faith which is heartfelt and that which is merely observed by a populace too afraid to do otherwise. In the story of Salman the Persian, Mahound's erstwhile scribe, the chapter exposes the tragedy of one who passionately wants to believe but cannot because the human capacity for doubt keeps getting in the way. His story is also a strong feminist criticism of Islam. The most notorious episode in "Return to Jahilia" has Baal sequestered in the local brothel with prostitutes who assume the idenitities of Mahound's wives. It too is based on hadith literature which comments on men who wondered why the prerogative of having 12 wives was unique to Muhammad. The episode works as a satirical spoof of men who are jealous and resentful yet too weak for open defiance. Each of the episodes will now be considered in greater detail.

After the opening episode, which establishes the general decrepitude of Jahilia and its denizens, the second episode belongs to Baal. When the poet sees a teardrop "the colour of blood" in the eye of the statue of Al-Lat, he understands that Mahound is on his way. Baal is surprised by a visit from Salman Farsi. Deep in his cups, the Persian scribe relates the story of his disillusionment with Mahound. "'The closer you are to the conjurer,'" Salman begins, "'the easier to spot the trick.'" (P. 363)

At the oasis of Yathrib, Salman tells Baal, the followers of Submission were poor, landless refugees. They lived as outlaws, supporting themselves by looting and robbing passing caravans. Paradoxically, it was at the very time of their lawlessness that Mahound "became obsessed by law." (P. 363) Mahound laid down rules about "every damn thing," regulating every aspect of human existence.[122]

Inevitably, Salman the Persian became very suspicious of a God who sounded so much like a businessman, so conveniently like Mahound himself. The obliging nature of Mahound's God began to obsess Salman.[123]

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[122] Again, Salman's observation is not an invention of Rushdie's. He is by no means the first to notice the change in the character of the revelation. The change has been commented on extensively in the history of Islam. Consider a typical example: "The contrast between Muhammad in Mecca and Muhammad in Medina touches upon one of the great problems in religion. On the one hand we see the preaching of a saint, or prophet, intensely living, inspiring, vivid. On the other, the rigid codes of morals, and the rules and ritual of an established 'church.' (...) If Muhammad had not laid down innumerable laws and regulations, his message may not have outlasted the death of his companions." John Bagot Glubb, **The Life and Times of Muhammad**, (New York, Stein and Day: 1970), pp. 230 - 231.

[123] Salman's suspicions are again grounded in traditional commentary about Islam. This is how Muhammad Husein Haykal, a conservative biographer of Muhammad describes an instance of revelation:

"...the Prophet had no time to spend on listening to each of his visitors, nor could he tolerate them to converse with his wives and broadcast their gossip. *Seeking to free the Prophet from these minor cares, God revealed the following*

What finally destroyed his faith, however, was the incident of the satanic verses and the revelation regarding the conduct of women: "'The point about our Prophet, my dear Baal,'" says Salman,

> "is that he didn't like his women to answer back, he went for mothers and daughters, think of his first wife and then Ayesha: too old and too young, his two loves. He didn't like to pick on someone his own size. But in Yathrib the women are different.... If (a woman of Yathrib) wants to get rid of her husband, she turns the tent around to face the opposite direction, so that when to comes to her he finds fabric where the door should be, and that's that, he's out divorced... Well, our girls were beginning to go for that type of thing..." (p. 366)

To Salman's dismay, "'out comes the rule book,'" with the angel pushing women back to the docile attitudes "'the Prophet prefers.'" (p. 367) One night, the scribe has a dream. In this dream-within-a-dream, Salman is not sure whether he is Gibreel or Shaitan, all he knows is that he is hovering over Mahound in the cave on Mount Cone, when he is struck by the memory of the satanic verses. It is at this point, within the dream, that Salman gets his "diabolic idea." He begins to

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verses:

> '...do not enter the house of the Prophet without permisson, ...gossiping harms the Prohet, who is shy to ask you to leave. But God is not shy of saying the truth. And if you ask the wives of the Prophet for something, then talk to them from behind a curtain.... It behoves you not to hurt the Prophet nor to marry his wives after him...'"

Muhammad Husein Haykal, **The Life of Muhammad**, (London: Shorouk International, 1983), p. 325. Italics mine.

change the revelation, and gives voice to the preoccupation at the heart of the novel: "'So there I was actually writing the Book, or rewriting, anyway, polluting the word of God with my own profane language.'" (P. 367)

Salman's dearest wish is that Mahound catch him and chastise him for his errors. It does not happen. Salman becomes more daring, making major changes -- substituting *Jew* for *Christian* for example-- which parody the process of reciting and transcribing revelation.[124] One day, Salman does see a flicker of doubt cross Mahound's face, and realizes he has pushed his testing to the limit. Any more alterations and he will surely be exposed, but Mahound's doubt comes too late to salvage his faith. Stripped of faith, Salman clings obstinately to life. He flees Yathrib for Jahilia, where Mahound's arrival is imminent and where, he is certain, Mahound will sentence him to death.

"'What makes you so sure he will kill you?'" asks Baal.

"'It's his Word against mine,'" replies Salman. (P. 368) Eventually, he falls asleep. Baal surveys the wreckage of his own life, the lost promise of his youth. Drifting into sleep himself, Baal is suddenly jolted awake by an idea: "Mahound, maybe I'll cheat you of your revenge." (P. 370)

In the third episode, the Grandee Abu Simbel surrenders Jahilia and embraces the faith. He recommends to the townspeople that they do the same. Hind's outrage is unbounded. She exhorts the people to fight in the name of Al-Lat, but they turn their backs on her.

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[124] Yet again, Salman's story has a foundation in hadith. In an account given by al-Tabari, scribe Abdullah ibn Sa'd lost his faith after the Prophet failed to notice a mistake in his transcription.
Fischer and Abedi, p. 413.

The fourth episode chronicles Mahound's return. Before setting foot in Jahilia, Mahound orders an advance army, "Go thou and cleanse the place." His soldiers destroy the temples of Lat, Uzza, and Manat, as well as the central shrine with its 360 stone gods. One by one, the townspeople come to make obeisance to Mahound and to Submit. Even Hind recites the qalmah at Mahound's feet. He nods his forgiveness: "'You have submitted,'" he tells her. "'And are welcome in my tents.'" (P. 374)

Salman Farsi is found and brought to Mahound. "'Your blasphemy, Salman, can't be forgiven,'" Mahound tells him. "'Did you think I wouldn't work it out? To set your words against the Words of God.'" (P. 374) Salman is a condemned man: "unable to muster even a scrap of dignity, he blubbers whimpers pleads beats his breast abases himself repents." (P. 374) Mahound's general Khalid offers to cut off Salman's head, but the scribe, desperate to ingratiate himself, volunteers the whereabouts of Baal's room. More interested in the satirist who tormented him, Mahound lets Salman go. But despite a thorough search of Jahilia, the old versifier is nowhere to be found.

In the fifth episode, Baal finds refuge in The Curtain, known to Jahilians as *Hijab*, the most popular brothel in town. He is successfully hidden in the labyrinthine corridors of the brothel when Khalid and his men come searching. Then, the Madam has the poet's skin and hair dyed blue-black and orders him to take a bodybuilding course, the better to pass as one of the guardian eunuchs. Here Baal is safe, at least for the time being: Mahound has offered a temporary reprieve to *Hijab* and other dens of iniquity. Here, Rushdie offers a direct satire of Khomeini, who ordered that whorehouses be closed after the revolution, but -- as in Mecca, centuries earlier -- gave them a transition period to phase themselves out of business.[125]

Behind The Curtain, Baal hears all of the town's secrets: he overhears Ibrahim the butcher tell one of the whores that there is a tremendous demand for black-market pork. He hears the grocer Musa confess to another whore that he still says a prayer or two to Manat and Al-Lat: "'...you can't beat a female goddess, they've got attributes the boys can't match.'" (P. 378) During this period of transition, it is Jahilians themselves who are most notably in transition, as they learn to dissemble a faith they do not feel.

Profound changes take place within Baal as well. The destruction of Al-Lat's temple convinces him she was no goddess, just a stone idol. But the fact that Al-Lat never was, Baal reasons, does not make Mahound a prophet. "In sum," the narrator tell us, Baal has arrived at "godlessness." (P. 379) The realization of godlessness stirs Baal toward an epiphany: he sees beyond gods, leaders and rules to the fact that his story is so intertwined with Mahound's that "some great resolution (is) necessary." (P. 379). When he hears Musa grumbling about the Prophet's wives, "*one rule for him, another for us*," Baal understands "the form his final confrontation with Submission would have to take." (P. 379)

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[125] Fischer and Abedi, p. 417.

The idea comes naturally to Baal. Mahound's seclusion of his harem leads to much salacious speculation among the men of Jahilia. Baal says to the youngest prostitute: "'If Ayesha gives (Musa) such a thrill, why not become his own personal Ayesha?'" (P. 390) The role-playing is so successful that Musa pays double his normal fee. Soon, each of other 11 prostitutes follows the example of the youngest whore by adopting the identity of one of Mahound's wives. Business booms.

At that time, it was a custom for prostitutes to enter a symbolic marriage so that they could adopt, for form's sake, the title of a married woman. (P. 380) The husband was symbolic, usually an inanimate object. (P. 380) The women of The Curtain entered into such a marriage of convenience with the water fountain, the "Love Spout" in the central courtyard. When the roles of Mahound's wives subsumes the identities of the prostitutes, their Madam suggests they need a "better grade of husband than some spouting stone, which was almost idolatrous after all..." (P. 383) Thus, in a bizarre homage to the faith and to Mahound, the women all choose to marry Baal. Moreover, they expected Baal "to fulfill his husbandly duty in every particular," which he does according to a rota system they work out.

Business continues to thrive with eager customers encircling the

Love Spout in a profane parody of pilgrims around the Black Stone. One day, one of the customers recognizes Baal. The customer is Salman Farsi. He and Baal have their second and final conversation. Salman recounts a rumour about Mahound's argument with Ayesha: "'That girl couldn't stomach it that her husband wanted so many wives.'" Finally, Mahound went into his customary trance, whereupon the Archangel Gibreel appeared to give Mahound "'God's own permission to fuck as many women as he liked.'" About which revelation, Ayesha is said to have observed, "'Your God certainly jumps to it when you need him to fix things up for you.'" (P. 386)[126]

To Salman's astonishment, Baal sides with Mahound, as if, in the years of pretending to be the Prophet, Baal has lost his own identity. "'You can see his point of view,'" Baal says. "'If families offer him brides and he refuses he creates enemies -- and besides he's a special man... Listen, if you lived here, you wouldn't think a little less sexual freedom was such a bad thing, -- for the common people, I mean.'" (P. 386)

"'Your brain's gone,'" Salman tells Baal. (P. 386) But, drinking again, Salman is not in a truculent mood. He is eager to recount another story about Ayesha: she and Mahound were on an expedition and had struck camp for the night. Just before departure, Ayesha had to answer a call of nature and went some distance away. Her palanquin bearers, not noticing the change in weight, left without her. Ayesha would have been stranded were it not for a young man passing by on his camel who delivered her to Mahound. Ayesha did not commit any impropriety, but the possibility of having done so, and the vulnerability of women under Submission to all sorts of innuendo, was enough to set tongues wagging. As luck would have it, Mahound revealed that God cleared Ayesha of any blame. "'And this time,'" concludes Salman, "'the lady did not complain about the convenience of the verses.'" (P. 387)[127]

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[126] According to the collection of hadith, **Sahih Muslim**, Ayesha said to Muhammad, "It seems to be that your lord hastens to satisfy your desires."
Imam Muslim, **Sahih Muslim** (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1984), Hadith 3453, p. 748.

Salman's visit serves to wake Baal up, as if his years behind The Curtain have been a dream. "'Something big is going to happen,' he (foretells). 'A man can't hide behind skirts forever.'" (P. 388) The next day, Mahound's vice squad comes to inform the Madam that the period of transition is over. The Madam commits suicide, the prostitutes are taken into custody, and the eunuchs are left weeping at the fountain.

Only Baal, full of shame for having ignored his wives' pleas for help, does not cry. Eventually however, he musters up the courage and inspiration for his final stand. Under the prison windows he sings odes to each of his wives: each ode is of surpassing beauty, each is dedicated to a woman who bears the name of one of the Prophet's wives. Baal's blasphemy is noticed and he is surrounded by angry men "demanding to know the reasons for this oblique, this most most byzantine of insults." Baal declares himself: "'I am Baal. I recognize no jurisdiction except that of my Muse; or to be exact, my dozen Muses.'" (P. 391)

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[127] The story concerning Ayesha is referred to in hadith as the *ifk* incident. An account of it appears in Fischer and Abedi, p. 416, Glubb, p. 265, and Haykal, p. 334. According to Fischer and Abedi, Muslim preachers use the story to warn women against any situation which may give cause for even the appearance of misdeed.

The twelve women are sentenced to stoning so that they may appreciate the immorality of their lives. Baal is brought before Mahound. He tells the story of his sojourn behind The Curtain, to the horrified mirth of the crowd. Before Mahound pronounces the sentence, he says,

> In the old days you mocked the Recitation. (...) Then, too, these people enjoyed your mockery. Now you return to dishonour my house, and it seems that once again you succeed in bringing the worst out of the people. (P. 392)

As Baal is marched away to his beheading, he, the only man in Jahilia with enough integrity of belief to defy the Prophet, shouts, "'Whores and writers, Mahound, we are the people you can't forgive.'" (P. 392)

"'Writers and whores. I see no difference here,'" replies Mahound. The link between writers and whores here is a none-too-subtle observation about how Khomeini and other fundamentalists treat writers and intellectuals.[128]

In the final episode, Gibreel dreams Hind secluded in a tower room studying occult texts for two years and two months. On the day she leaves the tower, she enters her husband's bedroom and says to him, "'Wake up. It's a day for celebrations.'" News arrives shortly that Mahound is mortally ill. He lies in Ayesha's bed "with his head thumping as if it had been filled up with demons." (P. 393) As Jahilia mourns, Hind rejoices, feasting by candle-light, which "sends strange shadows across her absolute, uncompromising face." (P. 393)

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[128] Fischer and Abedi, p. 417.

As a final coda to the chapter, Gibreel dreams the death of Mahound. At first, everything proceeds as it should. The Prophet reveals to Ayesha that, like all Prophets, he has been shown Paradise so that he may choose between this world and the next. "'I have been offered my Choice and I have chosen the kingdom of God.'" (P. 393) Then, something curious happens. The Prophet's eyes move to a shadowy corner of the room.

"'Who's there,'" Mahound calls. "'Is it thou Azraeel?'"

"'No, messeger of Al-Lah, it is not Azraeel,'" A woman's voice responds.

"'Is this sickness then thy doing, O Al-Lat?'"

"'It is my revenge upon you. Let them cut a camel's hamstrings and set it upon your grave.'" The figure disappears.

"'Still, I thank thee, Al-Lat, for this gift,'" murmurs Mahound. Shortly afterward, he dies. It is the end of Gibreel's dream.

Al-Lat's appearance instead of that of the angel of death is ambiguous and mysterious. It could be that the Recitation itself was an illusion, a dream within a dream. The biggest blasphemy that Rushdie was accused of was suggesting that the Qur'an is of human origin. There is however, another, more subversive possibility suggested by Al-lat's appearance at Mahound's deathbed. The Prophet's gratitude suggests that the revelation was provided by none other than Al-Lat so that she could prove to him the mysterious powers of God -- Her power -- and the pathetic ignorance of mortals. Mahound would then be humbled, as indeed he is, in her presence. What the Messenger and the Archangel failed to do in Gibreel's dreams -- develop a tangible connection with God -- Hind succeeded in doing. If Al-Lat is God, and that -- in the singular absence of Al-Lah from the text -- is the only tangible message the Messenger receives, then the qalmah may be rewritten, There is no Goddess but the Goddess and Mahound is Her Prophet.

"The Parting of the Arabian Sea" resumes the story of Ayesha's *haj.*[129] It is apocalyptic, a sad dream of ruin and destruction, which closely parallels the events of Gibreel Farishta's life. The actor has a psychotic episode at a party given in a bid to revive his movie career. He proclaims to all present that he is Azraeel, the angel of death. Pushing Gibreel to his final breakdown is his friend/foe Saladin, who, in dozens of disguised voices, phones

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[129] The story of Ayesha is not entirely an invention of Rushdie's. In Pakistan in the early 1980s, an 18-year-old girl in the village of Chakwal dreamed that the villagers walked across the Arabian Sea. At the end of their journey, they found money and work. Believing the dream, the villagers set out one night. All but 20 drowned. Pakistani police arrested the survivors and charged them with illegal emigration.

Hanif Kureishi, "The Rainbow Sign," in **London Kills Me: Three Screenplays and Four Essays**, (London: Viking Penguin, 1992), p. 16.

Gibreel to recite smutty, "satanic" verses about Alleluia Cone. The verses fuel Gibreel's insecurity and possessive jealousy and drive him over the edge. Meanwhile, London is burning. A black community leader, held by police as a suspected serial murderer, dies in custody. After his death, the murders start again. Whites attack blacks, but Sikh youths catch a white man in the act of perpetrating a murder. Racial tensions flare into rioting, and the working-class neighborhood where much of the novel takes place -- known here by the slightly altered name Brickhall -- turns into an inferno. Into this scene wanders Gibreel, now as Azraeel, who destroys the world with his fire-breathing trumpet. Despite his delusions, however, Gibreel commits a last selfless act by walking into a burning building and rescuing Saladin. In the ambulance to the hospital, the exhausted Gibreel has his final dream.

Ayesha's *haj* has acquired a force and momentum of its own, gathering more people on the long march to the sea as Mirza Saeed shouts imprecations from his Mercedes and Osman makes cynical jokes from atop his bullock cart. Even the police who try to stop the march defer to Ayesha's gaze.

As the villagers near the sea, they cross the city of Sarang. There the municipal authorities clear a path for them and arrange to have them rest at various mosques along the route. After prayers one day, the villagers descend the steps of the mosque and find an abandoned infant in a basket. The Imam of the mosque pronounces the baby "the spawn of the Devil," and an assembled mob stones the baby to death while Ayesha stands idly and obliviously by. The senselessness of this act, the abandonment of the best of the profane -- reason, humanity, love -- sickens the villagers, who did not participate in the stoning, and who, now, begin to doubt.

Sensing an advantage, Mirza Saeed asks Ayesha how the Archangel speaks to her. After some hesitation, she replies, "'The Archangel sings to me to the tunes of popular hit songs.'" (P. 497) The villagers ridicule her and give vent to their disgust. Pressing his advantage further, Mirza Saeed offers Ayesha a deal: he will fly his wife, Ayesha, and a dozen of her chosen to Mecca. The *haj*, he says, has already been full of miracles and Ayesha has fulfilled the requirement of the Archangel in spirit. Ayesha retreats to think and receive further revelation. "'The angel,'" she tells the villagers, "'told me about doubt and how the Devil makes use of it.'" (P. 499) Ayesha wins. "*I was tempted but am renewed; am uncompromising; absolute; pure.*" (P. 500) She tells the villagers that if they open their hearts, the water too will open for them.

Ayesha leads the villagers into the sea. The few skeptics who rush into the water in an attempt to save their loved ones have to be rescued by the police. Later, in independent statements to the authorities, all except Mirza Saeed say they beheld the parting sea and saw the villagers walking across the ocean floor. Meanwhile, the bodies of the *hajjis* wash up on shore.

On the last day of his life, moments before his death, Mirza Saeed feels butterflies struggling to enter his mouth. He sees Ayesha leading him into the water and finds himself drowning. "'Open,'" Ayesha commands. "'You've come this far, now do the rest.'" At the moment of his drowning, Mirza Saeed makes "a different choice," his heart breaks and he opens. The water parts and he walks to Mecca, with Ayesha, across the bed of the Arabian Sea.

Belief, Gibreel's final dream tells us, can accomplish anything, if only in the heart of the believer. Only when faith is uncompromising and pure can it fulfill its mission. But what manner of mission does such faith fulfill?

The Satanic Verses presents the reader with characters who compromise or not, according to the dictates of faith or reason. Outside Gibreel's dreams, there is the hijacker Tavleen fighting for an independent Khalistan. She is motivated not by political expedience but by the absolute certainty of her mission. She says to her hostages, "'History asks us: what manner of cause are we? Are we uncompromising, absolute, strong, or will we show ourselves to be timeservers who compromise, trim, yield?'" (P. 81) She answers her question by blowing up the plane. Ayesha and the Imam both refuse to compromise and their refusal, too, leads to carnage. The Grandee surrenders to Mahound in an act of compromise which is natural to him, so that he and the people of Jahilia may live. The possibility then exists, even if it is not realized, that they may live to fight another day. It is a possibility which Hind seizes when she feigns her Submission. She appears to compromise so that she may buy time and bide her time. Hind is thus able to keep her vow to fight Mahound to the death. Salman the Persian compromises, embracing the faith even though he has none, because he values life, especially his own. By this measure, he does not compromise because he does his best to preserve himself. Baal does not compromise. He maintains his integrity not because of his faith but because of his capacity for ordinary, profane love. In the end, he remains loyal to himself and to his wives. Mahound is the most problematic figure. He is shown in the novel to operate under considerations both sacred and profane. He is not tempted to compromise only when his profane powers are great enough to impose Submission by force. Each of Gibreel's dreams show the dangers of ideology and absolutism run amok. The chapters portray the evolution of an idea: first there was the compromise of the verses, a failed attempt to seduce people into believing. Then there were stronger measures -- violence, repression, the suppression and elimination of dissenting voices, and finally, the biggest challenge of all, getting people to accept, to submit to someone else's vision of their own accord. Certainty of purpose is seductive: Mahound's power is irresistible, as is the Imam's charisma and Ayesha's beauty and calm. The devil, one of the discourses of the novel tells us, is charming as well as tricky.

If Shaitan is ubiquitous in the novel, indeed, he is not above appropriating the narrative voice from time to time, it is God who is most notably absent. At the centre of the novel is a God-shaped hole in which Gibreel loses himself. The Messengers of his dreams offer the sacred as an alternative to the profane. But this of course is not the point of the sacred. The function of the sacred -- and by function, I mean its usefulness to human beings -- is to find sense in the profane. At the simplest level, a tree spirit may be understood to be responsible for the growth of trees, for example. Once people learn about the behaviour of molecules, osmosis and chlorophyll, those for whom physical laws are not enough require a more complex, encompassing faith. The need becomes crucial for Gibreel Farishta who cannot reconcile the notion of a just and loving God with the chaos of his own life.

Gibreel and Saladin respond in very different ways to the quest at the heart of the novel: to succeed in reconciling the sacred and the profane so that it is possible for the believer to live an authentic existence in this world. Saladin does not need God. The profane joys of love, culture, politics, the companionship of others and engagement with others are what sustain him. In contrast, the only Other Whom Gibreel seeks is God. Although he does transmogrify into an angel in an effort to get closer to Him, God is absent at best, or, in the worst of Gibreel's dreams, He is criminally negligent and morally corrupt.

As has been noted before, Gibreel is a desiring character: he wants to believe but has every reason not to. In this wise, he is similar to another character of desire: Salman the Persian. As the narrative says of Salman, and it holds equally true of Gibreel when he loses his faith, "There is no bitterness like that of a man who has been believing in a ghost." Instead of showing Gibreel the path to faith, the dreams mock him in every turn, leading him farther into the labyrinthine corridors of confusion and illness.

This chapter has concentrated on a fairly straightforward relating of Gibreel's dreams to show the progression of a faith at the same time as it becomes degraded: the dreams, in other words, show the progressive degradation of a faith to such a point that it no longer offers succor to the dreamer. Faith offers only brutality and horror, and the unassailable feeling that the dreamer has misplaced his faith all along. And this, perhaps, is the ultimate insight afforded by the dream sequences of **The Satanic Verses**: If faith is not expedient, if it does not make concessions and compromises for the sake of human beings, if it insists on absolutes, faith is horrific, murderous, demonic.

The single strongest story regarding the loss of faith in all of the dreams in the one told by Salman. The next chapter will present a narratological analysis of Salman's story. At the diegetic level, the story encapsulates the reasons for Gibreel Farishta's disintegration. Its function at the thematic level, however, is more important: the story shows the consequences of a loss of faith for someone who needs to believe. At the extradiegetic level of the world beyond the text, the story offers a text-bound insight into why Rushdie got into trouble.

Chapter Four

The Story of Salman the Persian

A Test Case for the Narratological Challenges of Interpretation
Posed by
The Satanic Verses

A year after Ayatollah Khomeni issued the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie, the author published an essay entitled "In Good Faith" in which he advanced a vigorous defence of his novel:

> **The Satanic Verses** is, I profoundly hope, a work of radical dissent and questioning and re-imagining. It is not however, the book it has been made out to be, that book containing 'filth and abuse' that has brought people out on to streets across the world.
>
> That book simply does not exist.[130]

However painful for Salman Rushdie, that book did exist in the minds of his critics. Rushdie acknowledges the existence of the novel that **The Satanic Verses** was never intended to be:

> I genuinely believed that my overt use of fabulation [dreams, fantasies] would make it clear to any reader that I was not attempting to falsify history, but to allow a fiction to take off from history....
>
> I was wrong.[131]

This chapter will use the tools of narrative theory to trace the use of overt fabulation within one passage from **The Satanic Verses,** analyze the devices used in constructing the fabulation and finally, as a result of the analysis, offer an explanation for why Rushdie turned out to be so disastrously wrong.

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[130] Salman Rushdie, "In Good Faith," (London: Granta, 1990), p. 4.

[131] "In Good Faith," p. 17. Rushdie uses the words "dreams" and "fantasies" farther down in the paragraph quoted. I have added them in square brackets to preserve the full sense of his argument and to conserve space.

The passage selected for analysis is the story told by Salman the Persian about why he fled Yathrib, the home of the prophet and the cynosure of a new and expanding religious idea. There are several reasons for this choice. **The Satanic Verses** is a story of stories, a narrative of narratives, and Salman the Persian's is short enough for the purposes of this study, yet it is eminently satisfying, with a proper beginning, middle and end. The story also offers a richly developed exploration of the loss of faith in the presence of an overwhelming desire to believe, and how such loss can plunge a soul into crisis. As Rushdie explains:

> **The Satanic Verses** is the story of two painfully divided selves. In the case of one, Saladin Chamcha, the division is secular and societal: he is torn, to put it plainly, between Bombay and London, between East and West. In the other, Gibreel Farishta, the division is spiritual, a rift in the soul. He has lost his faith and is strung out between his immense need to believe and his inability to do so.
>
> The novel is 'about' their quest for wholeness.[132]

The rift in Gibreel Farishta's soul is mirrored and multiplied in his psyche: his is a progressively dis-integrated self. The mundane world of doctors and psychiatrists within the novel calls him a "paranoid schizophrenic." (P. 338)

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[132] "In Good Faith," p. 7.

Perhaps the label is intended to place an ironic distance between the reader and Gibreel, and perhaps it succeeds. On a more profound level, however, both the reader and Gibreel are left to grapple with the tortured dreams which cast Gibreel in the role of the Archangel, reciting revelations the waking Gibreel can no longer take seriously from a God, Who, he believes, has abandoned him in the grip of a cruel illness.

Salman the Persian is a figment of Gibreel's dreams. As the fictional prophet's scribe, his growing doubt and ultimate loss of faith resonate in the dreams as parallels of Gibreel's own loss. The story of Salman the Persian is, in Rushdie's words, "the most extreme passage of doubting in the novel," and is not meant to "'insult and abuse'" the historical Muhammad's companion Salman al-Farisi.[133] It is more appropriately, continues Rushdie, "an ironic reference to the novel's author."[134]

Thus we come to the most compelling reason for focusing on the story of Salman the Persian. The vehemence and derision inherent in the lexis employed by Salman the Persian to express his loss of faith were interpreted by many as a direct attack on Islam by the author himself. In addition to the most obvious marker of the name, there are parallels between the Persian and the author. Both are extremely well educated within their respective millieux, both are scribes, both are immigrants to their societies. In a ghoulish, later development, both are condemned to death.

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[133] "In Good Faith," p. 8.

[134] Ibid.

The problem, then, of how one responds to the story of Salman the Persian and the story of Salman the author is one of subjective interpretation. Both stories are very complex: the first for reasons of narrative depth -- of how it is told -- and the second for reasons of culture and history, themselves grand narratives. Literary explorations permissible in one culture or historical tradition, for example, are not necessarily so in others. Our task is to examine the story of Salman the Persian as a representative test case for **The Satanic Verses** to see how the best of artistic intentions, carried out with the finest skills of a very fine writer, could have miscarried so badly.

Putting aside the broader issues of freedom of speech and artistic expression, we have seen that Rushdie's defence rests on fabulation, on the use of dreams and fantasies. There is the other, equally potent distancing device: throughout the novel, explorations of faith occur in the dreams of a man who is mentally ill. We have then, a character who is doubly unreliable.

Gibreel's unreliability has implications within the fiction and even more so within his dream of Salman the Persian, a fiction within a fiction, which Mieke Bal refers to as a "doubly fictitious object."[135] The problem with a doubly fictitious object, in this case, a dream within a story, is how the object is rendered, made apparent to the reader, in other words, how the private experience of a character is mediated and presented within the text. Someone has to see or have the dream, and someone has to tell it. Any narrative involves the two elements of seeing -- or experiencing -- and telling. There is a third element closely related to the first two: mediation, which refers to how the seeing is turned into the telling for the reader to read.

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[135] Mieke Bal, **Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative**, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p.109.

Mieke Bal, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan and Michael Toolan call the mechanism for the mediation of experience "focalization."[136] While all three borrow the term from Gennette, they define it in slightly different ways. Bal writes that focalization is the relationship between elements of a fabula (I use the word "story") and the vision through which they are seen.[137] Both Rimmon-Kenan and Toolan isolate the two questions inherent in focalization: "who sees?" and "who speaks?" The difference, writes Toolan, is essentially between the orientation from which the story is being told, and the individual who is the immediate source for the words that are used in the telling.[138] All three agree that "focalization" is superior to terms such as "point of view," "prism," or "perspective," because they do not take into account the disjuncture between orientation, the seeing or experiencing, and the source or authority of the words, the telling.

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[136] Bal, p. 100.
Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, **Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics**, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 71.
Michael Toolan, **Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction**, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 68.

[137] Bal, p. 100.

[138] Toolan, p. 68.

The rift between the seeing and the telling is crucial to any interpretation of the story of Salman the Persian because it is precisely through the distinctions between the focalizing roles of all the narrative agents in the story that the reader can draw a conclusion about its discursive intent.

At the beginning of the story of Salman the Persian, we read: "And Gibreel dreamed this:" (P. 363) There is no subsequent mention of Gibreel, nor is there any indication at this point that he is telling the event. We surmise that his role is solely one of experiencing the event. What Gibreel sees and hears is a mise en abîme of narrative: the story of Salman the Persian telling his story to Baal, another dream figure. There are in all three levels of narrative: "Gibreel dreamed this" is the framing one, the story of Salman the Persian telling his story, and Salman the Persian's story are the narratives within.

The Persian's speech is represented as free indirect discourse:

> Mahound had no time for scruples, Salman told Baal, no qualms about ends or means. (P. 363)

And:

> Amid the palm trees of the oasis, Gibreel appeared to the prophet and found himself spouting rules, rules, rules, until the faithful could scarcely bear the prospect of any further revelation, Salman said, rules about every damn thing... (P. 363)

But the speech representation borders closely on free direct discourse, presented largely in the form of a monologue shorn of conventional rules of punctuation indicating speech. There is also much direct discourse: "'Anyway,' Salman said near the bottom of the bottle, 'finally I decided to test him.'" (P. 367)

The discourse within the dream is direct and belongs entirely to Salman the Persian, who narrates his experience in flashback, focalizing his doubt, then disbelief, then despair, and finally, his defeat. He also focalizes for both the characters of the Archangel Gibreel and the Prophet. For instance, as in the example above, Salman the Persian says that the Archangel Gibreel "found himself spouting." Of Mahound, he says, "'the point about our Prophet my dear Baal, is that he didn't like his women to answer back.'" (P. 366) Salman is therefore the experiencer and interpreter of events, containing within himself both the orientation and the authority for their telling:

> After that, Salman began to notice how useful and well timed the angles's revelations tended to be... (P. 364)

And:

> The fishy smell began to obsess Salman, who was the most highly educated of Mahound's intimates, owing to the superior educational system then on offer in Persia... (P. 365)

We see here that there are complications: a voice, not Gibreel's, not Salman's, is referring to Salman in the third person, and offering background information about him. There is therefore an extradiegetic focalizer. We may also call him/her/it the extra-extradiegetic focalizer since the dreaming Gibreel is, strictly speaking, the extradiegetic focalizer -- who experiences rather than tells the event -- of this story within a story. I posit the existence of such a focalizer because Gibreel has no more control over the fabulations of his dreams than he has over their occurrence: they simply come over him. When Gibreel first starts having his dreams, for instance, his fear is focalized:

> Sometimes when he sleeps, Gibreel becomes aware, without the dream of himself sleeping, of himself dreaming his own awareness of his dreams, and then a panic begins, O God, he cries out, O allgood allahgod, I've lost my bloody chips, me. Got bugs in the bloody brain... (P. 92)

Even in the persona of the Archangel Gibreel, he has no idea what agency is making him "spout rules, rules, rules." There is a stripping of agency from the dreaming Gibreel -- who, it must be remembered is simultaneously the Archangel Gibreel -- by the same authority who denies Gibreel agency over the event of dreaming:

> Angels are easily pacified: turn them into instruments and they'll play your harpy tune... angels, they don't have much in the way of a will. (P. 92)

The real author, Salman Rushdie, on the other hand, gives more agency to the dreamer than is readily evident in the text of the novel. Of the story of Salman the Persian, he writes:

> It is quite true that the language here is forceful, satirical, and strong meat for some tastes, but it must be remembered that the waking Gibreel is a coarse-mouthed fellow, and it would be surprising if the dream figures he conjures up did not sometimes speak in as rough and even obscene a language as

their dreamer.[139]

The real author's argument may or may not be accepted, again depending on one's point of view. But in this instance, the argument is difficult to reconcile with textual evidence because, as we have already seen, the dreamer has no agency, either as himself, or as the Archangel. As far as the defence of lexis is concerned: yes, Gibreel's dreams are richly populated, and every character has a distinctive social register. Mahound, for example, acquires in "Return to Jahilia" a distinctly formal voice of authority he did not have in "Mahound." The various social registers may well be at the disposal of Gibreel, who was at one time an "omnivorous autodidact," and who is, furthermore, a movie actor used to all manner of scripts.

But the dreaming Gibreel also recites verses in perfect Arabic, a language his waking self does not know. (P. 340) There is an outside chance that the other focalizer is Baal. But the only direct evidence of his focalization in the text is: "Baal couldn't recall when he'd last heard anyone talking up such a storm." (P. 366) Despite the ambiguity of focalization, a convincing case exists for an extra-extradiegetic focalizer at a level beyond Gibreel Farishta. If we accept this focalizer, we may identify him simply as the narrator of the novel, the same authority who earlier stripped Gibreel of agency within and without his dreams.

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[139] "In Good Faith," p. 8.

There are also ambiguities of focalization at the extradiegetic and diegetic levels: Gibreel is dreaming that Salman the Persian tells a story. We know that Gibreel is unreliable, but so is Salman because of drink and increasing loquacity. The problem is that an opposing argument for the reliability of both focalizers can easily be made. Before Salman tells his story, he comes to Baal in a confessional mood. It is possible that the toddy simply helps him lose his normal inhibitions and speak frankly about his experience.

The argument for the reliability of Gibreel is more complex: before this particular dream, he wanders the streets of London and concludes that the problem with the English is that they are "damn cold fish!" (P. 352) They are so because of their weather, which he decides to transform: "'City,' he cried, and his voice rolled over the metropolis like thunder, 'I am going to tropicalize you.'" (P. 352) Shortly afterward, within the normative world of the novel, one character says:

> Listen, isn't this weather something. They say it could last months: "blocked pattern." I heard it on television, rain over Moscow, while here it's a tropical heatwave. (P. 366)

No less an authority than television is brought in to bestow credibility upon Gibreel Farishta. There is another indication in the text that Gibreel's dreams are at least as credible as the events of his quotidian life:

> He found himself escaping into sleep, diving headlong into it because the real terror had crossed the broken boundary wall and stalked his waking hours. (P. 356)

If the laws of the world posited by **The Satanic Verses** make it possible for a madman to alter nature by fiat, then may not his dreams also be a conduit to a distant but equally credible world? Such a theory would explain his dream knowledge of Arabic.

Ambiguity overlaps ambiguity to such an extent that certainty is crowded out. Certainly, in the character of Gibreel Farishta, there are indications of deepening psychosis and an increasingly dissociated self. He says, for example: "'The craziness is in here and it drives me wild to think that *he* could be in charge again.'" (P. 340) If, however, the Archangel is merely a chimera of paranoid schizophrenic delusion, then there is no explaining Gibreel's fluency in Arabic. Perhaps again, the reliability of Salman and Gibreel is a matter of personal interpretation. There is no doubt however, that as Gibreel's illness worsens, his dreams are far more coherently focalized than is his waking life.

So far, we have addressed the ambiguities of focalization at the extra-extradiegetic level surrounding the event of dreaming, at the extradiegetic level of the event of the dream and at the diegetic level of Salman the Persian telling his story. The final level of focalization to consider is at the intradiegetic level in the story. At this level, we find intricately embedded focalization surrounding the seminal event of divine revelation. The Archangel Gibreel receives the revelation, recites it as the focalizer to the prophet Mahound who in turn, recites it as the focalizer to Salman the Persian who, in his role as scribe, reproduces the recitation of Mahound as free direct discourse, presumably, therefore, with no further mediation. Except that the scribe is really a focalizing narrator, and even more so a focalizing fabulator, because he invents the Word of the Prophet. Except again, the fabulator, doubting the existence of an actual, reciting angel, re-invents or re-fictionalizes the chicanery of Mahound, therefore the false recitation of angel, and therefore the false revelation of God.

With the symbol ">" meaning "greater than," but also for our purpose, "focalizes for, or has authority over," the chain of focalization may be written out thus:

((God)) > (Archangel) > Mahound > Salman the Persian >

God is in double parentheses, because God is an absence in the story. The Archangel is in parentheses because within the discourse of the story, and not having "much in the way of a will," he serves Mahound, not an absent God. The Word then, would originate with Mahound.

The chain could then be cut out, and the ends taped together to form a circle. From such a model of focalization, it would be clear that Salman the Persian's authority over the Word is paramount through each successive revelation. As he says at the end of his story: "'It's his Word against mine.'" (P. 368)

"There is no al-Lah but al-Lah, and Muhammad is his prophet," say the believers. God is present. The origins of the Word are divine, not human. And it is Muhammad who is the mediator, or supreme focalizer, if you will, for the Word of God. Muhammad is neither a false prophet nor can his authority be wrested from him by some fabulating scribe. If Salman the Persian is in fact a reference to Salman the author, if the fraudulent Mahound is in fact Muhammad in flimsy disguise, and if the dream religion is in fact a direct reference to Islam, then the implications for the author are dire, as in fact they have proven to be. It all really does depend on one's interpretation: how literally will we interpret a work that is meant to be interpreted literarily?

We are thus led inevitably back to questions of the role and legitimacy of fabulation. It is important to remember that **The Satanic Verses** is a fiction, a story, and it is proper to a story, in its most exalted form, to address the complexity of human existence. But there are two separate questions here: the first is, is it legitimate for an author to explore the issues of faith and doubt? The second is more difficult to answer: Did Rushdie go too far?

The analysis offered in this chapter has, I hope, been illuminating, but it is by no means conclusive. It neither absolves nor incriminates the author, but it does show that, at the textual level, there is plenty of evidence to fuel both sides of the argument. Ultimately, one can only choose a side, and in each case the choice devolves on personal belief: the choice is far more complex than simply determining the guilt or innocence of the author. Even if one sees that there are textual grounds for feeling aggrieved or offended, for example, one can choose to acknowledge the legitimacy of questioning and exploration. Even if the author is somehow judged guilty of having knowingly caused offence, there is still no justification for wanting to murder him. The concluding chapter will offer some final thoughts on artistic license and the uses of literature.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis, I wrote that **The Satanic Verses** is important to anyone who is interested in how the creative act absorbs the world, is influenced by it and, in turn, exerts its own influence on the world. To illustrate my point, Chapters One through Four explored the world and the book. Because I wished to focus specifically on what those who condemned Rushdie found offensive, I omitted over half the novel from my analysis and spoke of it only in broad, general terms.

Before offering some concluding thoughts, I wish to consider briefly the half I omitted. All the major characters in the five chapters which deal directly with contemporary British society are engaged -- to a greater or lesser extent -- in a quest for personal and social identity. Saladin Chamcha is a secular man, an Indian of Muslim birth. He is an actor whose singular talent in British society is his marvelous, protean voice. He became successful by doing voices for commercials and by starring in a TV show (the Alien Nation) in heavy make-up. He became successful by divorcing himself completely from his cultural and ethnic roots. The name of the TV show makes explicit Saladin's alienation from a vital part of his identity. His quest as an immigrant is, foremost, to acknowledge that he is an immigrant, rather than the Englishman he fancied himself to be. Saladin's crises come when his agent tells him he is no longer saleable and when he learns that his father is dying. He begins to reconcile himself with the part of his identity he has so long denied. He succeeds by learning to love his father, by, for the first time in his life, loving an Indian woman, and by participating in immigrant and Indian life.

Saladin's wife Pamela Lovelace has the tweedy, upperclass accent which is a strong social marker in Britain. Her accent confines her and belies her sense of solidarity with people of humbler origins, the marginalized and the misfit. Pamela Lovelace uses alcohol to fill her own void and keep her demons at bay: she feels unloved (Lovelace: loveless) and abandoned by parents who committed suicide when she was just a little girl.

Saladin's colleague and co-star Mimi Mammoulian is also a voice without a face: she is a Jewish woman of talent and ferocious intelligence who is cursed with homely looks. She wants love and approval, and settles, knowingly, for a man of far lesser character than her own.

Alleluia Cone is a famous mountain-climber who has achieved an ascent of Mount Everest as well as the even more difficult task of climbing back down. Fate is capable of much cruel irony: Allie is afflicted by painful flat feet and must give up her ambition of climbing Everest solo. She is also Jewish -- her father having anglicized the name "Cohen" -- so she, like all of Rushdie's major characters has a complex, multilayered identity. Also like the other characters, Allie must cope with a personal tragedy, in her case, the suicide of a sister. Her biggest tragedy, however, is her futile battle for the love and sanity of Gibreel Farishta.

Gibreel Farishta's quest for faith and psychological wholeness finds expression in his dreams. When his illness overtakes him, he, like Rekha Merchant, kills those who love him, and himself. Both Gibreel and Saladin are actors. Their jobs are a metaphor for the thematic concerns of the novel because they spend their productive lives pretending to be something they are not. If Saladin's story shows us that it is possible to move forward in life only by remembering one's history, then Gibreel's story shows us that it is impossible to move forward if one remains rooted in history. His dogged struggle to recuperate a faith lost forever is his undoing.

The Satanic Verses absorbed the world by depicting recognizable, fully-realized characters in a recognizable, fully-realized world. The creative act absorbed aspects of life as disparate as the Bombay Tiffin Carriers Association, the rarified existence of movie stars, the denizens of the Shandaar Café, the fanaticism of creationists and hijackers, the mythical past in Argentina of Rosa Diamond, and the bizarre bestiary of the detention centre for immigrants from which Saladin escapes. The creative act embraced, absorbed, and showed the very rich and the very poor, the mundane and the otherworldly, the real and the surreal.

The novel was influenced by and assimilated the big existential questions human beings ask themselves, each other, and, those who believe, also ask God. In the dream chapters, the novel showed that it had also absorbed the tradition of questioning within Islam. Rushdie is a fabulator, not a fabricator: the chapters pertaining to the religious quest are firmly rooted in history, hadith, and counter-doctrinal debate, which enjoyed validity within Islamic tradition long before the current crop of fundamentalists condemned the author.

The Satanic Verses influenced the world by encouraging it to ask questions at the heart of the novel and by inviting readers to join in the exploration. It demanded that those who object to it examine and confront the reasons why. Sometimes we choose that which gives us offence and it is then incumbent upon us to ask ourselves about our biases.

Those of Rushdie's critics who read the book accused him of continuing the high-handed arrogance of the Orientalists. I believe however, that a fair and considered reading of **The Satanic Verses** proves that their accusations are without foundation because they did not take enough of the book into account, they did not consider it as a literary work, nor did they consider it within the context of the commentary and debate from which it draws its inspiration. The opposing argument is that most of those who did read it, and the many, many more who heard about it, are also unaware of the nuances of the literary and religious debates within which the novel is situated, and to them, the novel is essentially another screed ridiculing Islam. According to this view, Rushdie damaged Islam, and, given his fame and reputation, damaged it very effectively.

The horror and the pity of the Rushdie affair is that many who endorsed the Ayatollah's edict, indeed who declared that they themselves would gladly murder Salman Rushdie, did not read the book, and therefore did not give the author a chance to defend himself, nor did they give themselves a chance to examine the reasons for their anger. In a disarmingly ingenuous vein, a member of the Bradford Council of Mosques declared on television: "Books are not my thing."[140] Yet he and leaders like him were the source of an overwhelming proportion of Muslim opinion against the novel. From the perspective of focalization theory, there is here an inescapable irony: for many people, the ultimate focalizers of **The Satanic Verses** were authorities who had no experience of the book, but proceeded to tell it anyway.

In the interest of fair play, therefore, I would like to give Salman Rushdie a final word:

> What is freedom of expression? Without the freedom to offend, it ceases to exist. Without the freedom to challenge all orthodoxies, it ceases to exist.... **The Satanic Verses** is, in part, a secular man's reckoning with the religious spirit. It is by no means always hostile to faith.... Yet the novel does contain doubts, uncertainties, even shocks... Such methods have however, long been a legitimate part even of Islamic literature.[141]

I would like to conclude by reprising the word "literature" in the above citation. However one may feel personally about the novel, **The Satanic Verses**, like all accomplished art, presents the reader with a semantically saturated, richly patterned text. Indeed, its very complexity and artistic merit are the reason for the unprecedented controversy it sparked: one group of individuals awarded the novel a prize, while another wanted to murder its author. People all over the world leapt to its author's defence or rushed to condemn him.

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[140] "In Good Faith," p. 12.

[141] "In Good Faith," p. 6.

Had Rushdie wished to pen an anti-Islam screed, as his critics claim **The Satanic Verses** is, he could have done so with considerably less effort than the writing of a complex, ambitious, and densely textured novel demands. But Rushdie's aim was higher. As we have seen, he was off the mark for many, for legitimate reasons. However, interpreting literary work requires more skill and more experience reading such works than many extremists and fundamentalists had. In any case, they did not trouble to read **The Satanic Verses**, and therefore did not interpret the novel. They chose instead the easy option of calling the novel an insult to a faith they themselves underestimate and insult with their mean understanding.

The global village is a place of instant communication, but the understanding is still missing. Words cross boundaries, cultures, and differences, but the codes get left behind. I have argued that it is the personal responsibility of those who would condemn Rushdie to read the novel and enter into the exploration the novel asks of the reader. There are, of course, many barriers to this particular undertaking: even in the presence of desire and literacy sufficient to read a long and complex work, it is now unlikely that the novel will be widely published or distributed, to say nothing of the possibility of it being translated into Arabic or Urdu. There is indeed a chasm of understanding which will not be closed in the foreseeable future. The chasm is further deepened by the political ambitions of various leaders in the Islamic world and by the mistrust and hatred which exists between Islam and the West. It is safe to say however, that, apart from the rioters who were killed, Salman Rushdie is the most serious casualty of the Rushdie affair. The rioters who died, however, were doing something they should not have been doing when Pakistani police opened fire, or when they became involved in a particularly violent part of the mob in Kashmir.

Some of Rushdie's critics gloated that he "asked for it." It is a philistine thing to say. To ask whether or not Rushdie did "ask for it" is grotesque, but it is a question which I have been addressing in one form or another throughout this thesis. He did not ask for it, but that is now irrelevant. He became not an outlaw of the global village, but its prisoner, sentenced without due process, without trial, without judge or jury, and without a mechanism for appeal.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, of the current Labour government, has worked hard to secure a greater measure of freedom and safety for Salman Rushdie. His efforts have been helped by the fact that the government of Mohammad Khatami is interested in leaving behind the Rushdie affair and the *fatwa* which so poisoned relations between Iran and the West.[142] Iranian authorities however, have done very little very late. By their own admission, the *fatwa* itself is impossible to overturn. The Iranian government has also not made any commitment to criminalize the murder, or the intention to murder, Salman Rushdie. Nor, in these days immediately following the statement to the UN General Assembly, has the Iranian government stated that it will declare unlawful any reward for the murder of Salman Rushdie. Recognizing that the author is far from safe, the British government will continue to provide protection, for which people of conscience are grateful.

Rushdie is under a sentence which cannot be repealed as long as the world remains dangerous and as long as there is even one enterprising zealot.

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[142] Elizabeth Renzetti with Reuters News Agency, **The Globe and Mail**, 23 September 1998, p. A10.

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